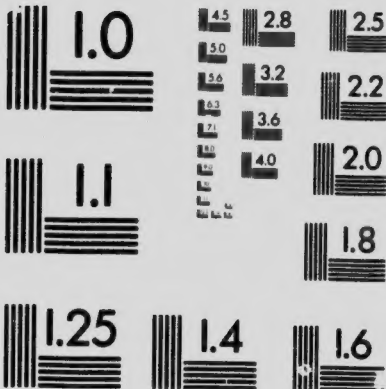


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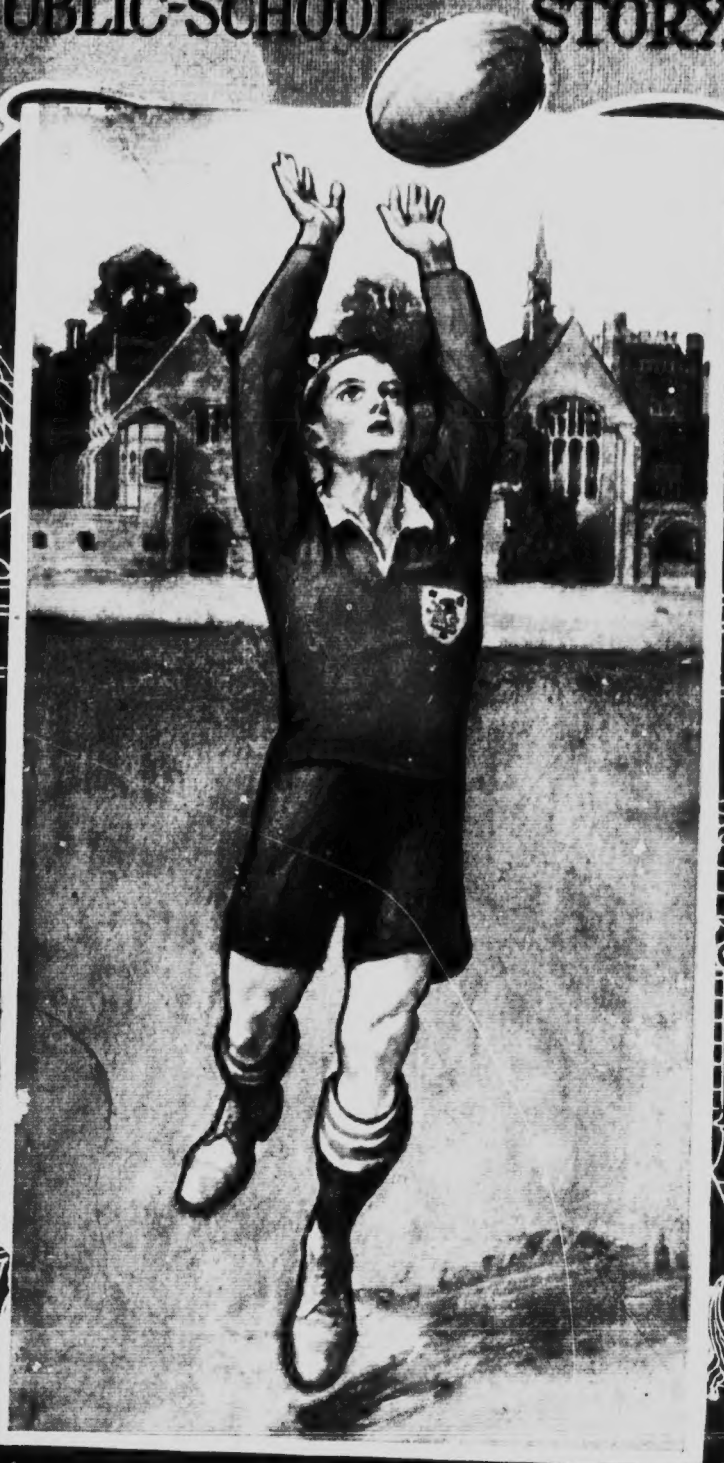


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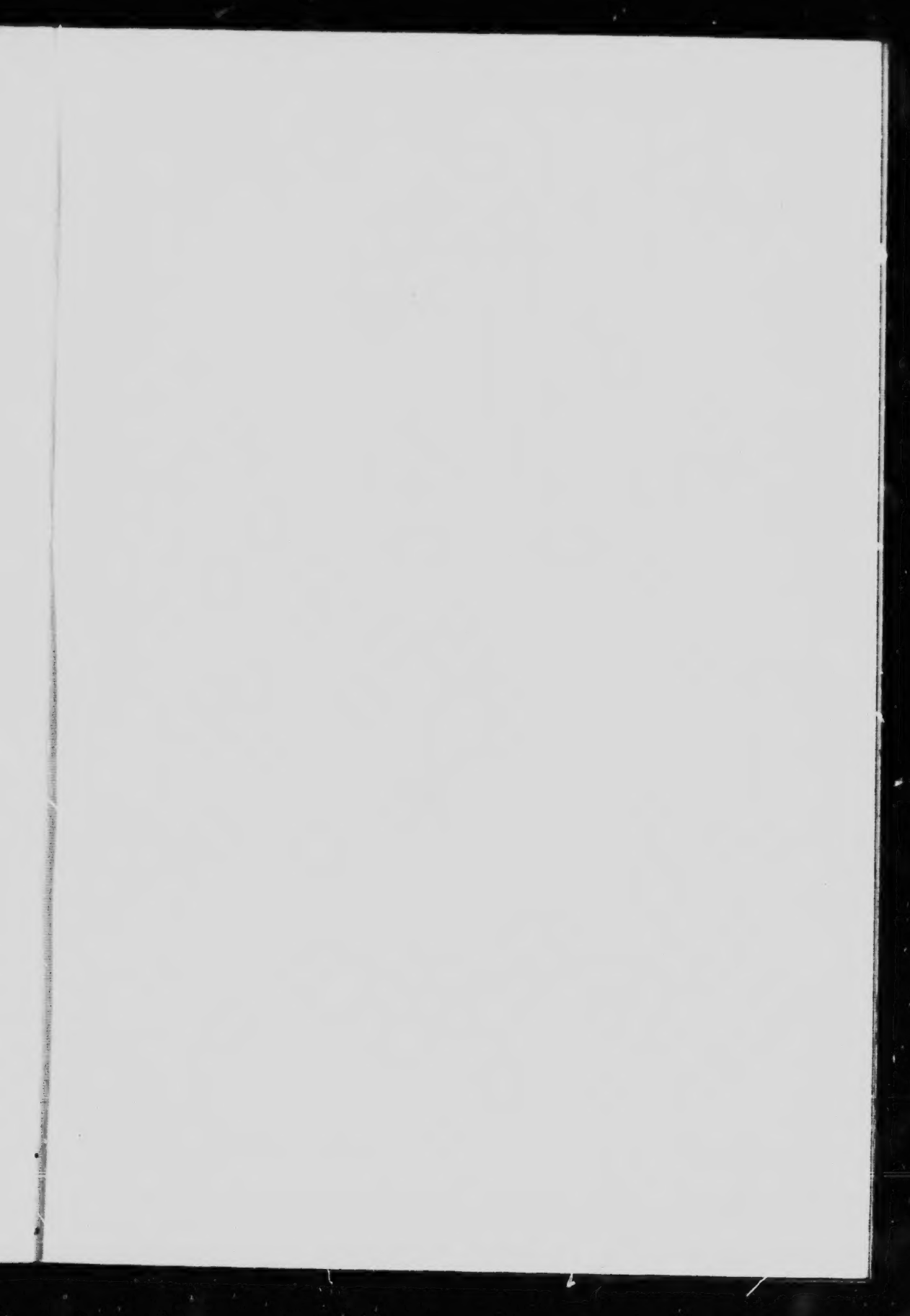
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To Leighton
With Dad's love
Xmas 1911.







PLAYING THE GAME





"The next instant he felt himself wriggling in the air."

PLAYING THE GAME!

A Public-School Story.

By

KENT CARR

Author of "A Rank Outsider," etc.

Toronto

THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY
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Playing the Game

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF "SCISSORS"

When Mr. James Hythe decided to send his son and heir to St. Osyth's, it was with the avowed intention of making a gentleman of him. As it happened this was rendered unnecessary in the case of Hythe junior, since Nature had obligingly taken that part of the business upon herself. Also, though one grieves to have to record it, the fact that he had been educated at a cheap middle class day-school did not cause him to exhibit any startling deficiency in mental acquirements when contrasted with the youth of St. Osyth's, but rather the reverse.

To look at, Reginald Taunton was just an ordinary boy, rather undersized, indeed, at this stage of his career, the aforesaid day-school having had misguided leanings towards the development of brains rather than muscle. But steady eyes and a rather remarkable chin saved his face now, and at all future time, from the charge of being commonplace.

His father was a London tailor in a large way of business. But one of his favourite excursions was to a little shop in a back street of Poplar, where the basis of his present success had been laid. It had long since passed into humbler and less skilful hands, but old recollections endeared it to the great man still. It was this shop which indirectly led to the hope of the Hythes being sent to St. Osyth's at all.

By way of providing his young son with an agreeable afternoon's diversion, Mr. Hythe had escorted him one Saturday afternoon to the wilds of Poplar, and there pointed out the grimy shop to him with pardonable pride.

"It was there I made a living—an' a rattling good living, too. But I guess you are thanking your stars that times are changed, eh, sonny?" he said.

Reginald Taunton surveyed the small, sordid building, with its rows of ready-made trousers, and its greasy placard announcing that any purchaser of these delectable garments would receive a fancy ornamental waistcoat thrown in, with feelings which found utterance in an emphatic:

"Rather!"

"Well, don't you go being ashamed of your father, all the same," said his parent, an odd wistfulness, making itself heard in his blustering, vulgar voice.

Hythe junior gave him rather a nice look. "I'm not likely to, dad," he said quietly.

"No more I believe you are," said his father, his florid face suddenly lighting up. "And because I am a risen man that's no reason why you should not have a chance with the best of 'em. If your mother had lived she'd have said the same too. That school you're at's no class when all's said and done. How should you like to go to one where you'd be in with the swells?"

"If they were decent chaps I shouldn't mind," said his son.

His parent surveyed him in some perplexity. "You're built different to me—always was," he remarked; "but to go back to what we were saying. One of the trustees of St. Osyth's is by way of being a friend of mine. I'll get you fixed up there before you're many weeks older."

Strange to say the Head of St. Osyth's did not view the matter in quite the same light as did Mr. Hythe. And when the latter called upon him with an explicit statement of his desires, he was met by the chilling information that St. Osyth's being full—indefinitely full—would unfortunately be unable to extend her hospitality to Reginald Taunton either at this or any future time.

But if the Doctor thought the matter was at an end there, he was very much mistaken.

And this seems the right point at which to explain the curious state of affairs at St. Osyth's, which led to young Hythe being domiciled there with a promptitude sufficiently startling in the face of the Doctor's dictum.

Now, as a matter of fact, St. Osyth's was by no means full, "nor 'arf" as Hythe *père*, having made it his business to find out, indignantly explained to his friend the trustee. It had still its old name—a name which was known all the English-speaking world over—and which stood for certain fine traditions which every St. Osyth's fellow understood, though he might not have been able to put them into words. But there was no doubt about it; it had failed to keep pace with the times. It was not holding its own with other schools of the same standing. Also its numbers were falling off to an extent which led to the trustees calling meetings with what, from the head master's point of view, was almost exasperating frequency.

But when invited to peruse the diminishing balance-sheet, the Doctor in his stately way waved it aside. "Other qualities are required in the head of a great public school, than those of an accountant," he told them, as one speaking from a great height.

But if in the beginning the trustees had accepted the snub with a certain amount of

awe, all that was a thing of the past. They had begun to realise the Doctor's inefficiency underneath all his grand manner, and in one thing at least they had had their own way. For to the disgust of Doctor and school alike, they had been so lost to all sense of right feeling as to tack on a Modern Side to St. Osyth's classic ranks. But as the Doctor had not only sat upon the institution through every stage of its feeble and precarious existence, but also regarded with tacit approval all attempts of the boys to do likewise, it could hardly be said to have flourished. Most of its members were crowded into the smallest and least desirable of St. Osyth's houses, whose house-master, Mr. Yago (cannot any boy supply the nickname by which he was most generally known for himself?) shared the general unpopularity.

However, the Modern Side excepted, the efforts of the trustees to modernise, or as the Doctor put it, vulgarise the old place, met with scant success.

"My dear sir, the school is going to rack and ruin," expostulated one of the trustees more daring than the rest, "and according to all accounts the youngsters are allowed a perniciously free hand."

The Doctor looked down at him with pitying contempt.

"St. Osyth's has always laid a special

stress on the value of the monitorial system as a means of self government," he explained. "We allow our elder boys a large share of authority over the younger ones, so that in the days to come, when they rise to positions of command, they will have learned the right use of power."

But in spite of this comfortable programme, St. Osyth's continued to creep, not to say race, down-hill. So that when Mr. Hythe, burning with his wrongs, rushed off to the friendly trustee—was it perhaps true that the prince of tailors united to his more legitimate business that of a private money-lender?—he received a sympathy quite touching in its warmth. And in a letter couched in terms as unlike his own dignified phraseology as could well be, the trustees found themselves unable to withhold from the Doctor the fact that as a result of his ministrations, St. Osyth's was not in a position to refuse any application whatsoever. Also that a vacancy must be *made*—the word was underlined satirically—for the son of the worthy Mr. Hythe, or the consequences might be regrettable. It was not the sort of letter that even the Doctor could disregard, and with feelings that can be understood, he was obliged to write and tell the unspeakable tailor that his application had been reconsidered.

The latter's blatant triumph was a little difficult to bear. Indeed in their second interview, only the veiled threat contained in the trustees' letter, kept the Doctor even outwardly civil to him. But the other's natural shrewdness did not desert him through all his noisy jubilation. Thus, when the Doctor with ineffable loftiness observed:

"I presume you wish to enter your son for the Modern Side," he was down on him like a weasel on a rabbit.

"Now why should you presume that?" he demanded with a cunning look.

"The Modern Side was intended for such—er—cases as your son's," the Doctor condescended to explain. "Its object is chiefly—I might say wholly—utilitarian. With the exception of Latin, which doubtless you will regret, as having no practical value, the subjects taught are such as are calculated to fit those learning them for a definite profession, or even in the last resort—a trade."

"Meaning that the Moderns aren't so ornamental as the what-d'ye-call-'em—Classics?" asked his visitor.

"If you like to put it in that way, yes," answered the Doctor.

"Then if the Classics are the swells and the Moderns the ruck, my boy goes with the swells," declared Mr. Hythe firmly and obstinately.

"As you like," said the Doctor in a wearied voice. "I will enter him for Mr. Yago's at once."

"Is Mr. Yago's the best house? I thought I heard something about its being overrun with Moderns. What about the School House now?" asked Mr. Hythe still suspicious.

"There are no best houses," explained the Doctor elaborately. "The School House happens to be the largest numerically, while Mr. Yago's, though in no sense belonging wholly to the Moderns, certainly does contain more members of that side than the other houses. I suggested it for your son with the idea that he might possibly feel more at home in that—er—element."

"The School House is my ticket, all the same," returned Mr. Hythe, "and even if it's as full up as the school itself was at our last *parlez-vous*, I've no doubt you'd be able to *make* a vacancy there. To oblige me—come now."

The grin with which the speaker pointed the word left the unfortunate master in no doubt of his cognisance of the wording of the fateful letter. For a moment he thought of staring his visitor down, but a glance into the latter's cunning little eyes made him change his mind. And without more words, he entered Reginald Taunton for a house which was to him as the apple of his eye.

That the members of the latter did not receive the young gentleman's advent with any marked enthusiasm, need not be set down to any particular snobbishness on their part. To the majority of them, the fact that his father was a tailor mattered as little as if he had been a prince. The really important point was whether he was likely to be good at the games or not. And as his physique didn't open out any dazzling prospect of this, such interest as he aroused may be ascribed to the fact that, coming as he did in the middle of the term, his presence offered an agreeable break in the general monotony. Even the nickname which he received on the first day, and which stuck to him more or less during the whole of his school career, was something of an accident.

Being put through his scholastic paces by Mr. Warre, the House Master, his accomplishments were found to qualify him for a high place in the Fourth. They might even at a pinch have qualified him for the Fifth, but a glance at the boy's slight frame and a thought of the young giants among whom in that case his lot would be cast, influenced the kindly House Master's decision. As it was even, some members of the Fourth could almost have made two of him in point of size.

His examination over he was taken by Mr.

Warre to the Fourth Form class-room, given a general introduction to his companions, and left to make their closer acquaintance for himself. They were assembled for third lesson, and unfortunately for him, Mr. Abbot, who was chronically unpunctual, almost broke the record on this occasion.

"Hello, young 'un! Isn't there some mistake? Sure you're not a Bleater?" asked Giffard, a handsome well set up youngster, with rollicking eyes, and hair which might be called yellow or red according to the taste—or temper—of the person describing it. For the uninitiated, if any such there be, it may be as well to explain that "Bleaters" was the generic name given to the fags of St. Osyth's by their superiors.

"Mr. Warre said I was to be in the Fourth. I think it's all right," said the new boy, taking him literally.

"But suppose we think it all wrong? and suppose we don't see letting a kid like you set himself up here?" retorted Berkeley, a particular chum of Giffard's, who always followed his lead.

"Jolly cool, I call it!" laughed Ogle, a member of the Modern Side and an inhabitant of "Yaegers," the despised house in which, but for the paternal intervention, Hythe himself would have been domiciled.

Giffard turned on him rudely. "You

needn't drag yourself in!" he said, "a Modern isn't us!"

"Well, we have managed to rub along all right without you so far!" snapped Phillpott, also of the Modern Side. There was no particular need for him to cast himself into the breach, and Ogle didn't look at all grateful. But of all the Modern Side Phillpott was the one who took the low estate of that body most to heart, and now as he bristled up to his colleague's side, with his crabbed freckled face and aggressive manner, he reminded one for all the world of a snapping bull-terrier.

"Not so much jaw there!" said Farquhar. And it was noticeable that at the sound of his voice they all stopped to listen. In a community which made it a point of honour for everybody to speak at once, the fact said a good deal. But then Farquhar was a tremendous force, even in those days, the leading light of the Second Eleven, and although one hesitates to speak of such a minor matter in the same breath, easily top of his form. "We've about had enough of you, Phillpott, and that little worm of yours, Ogle," he continued in his cocksure way. "You want your heads punched, both of you."

"I'd like to see you try it on!" cried Phillpott while Ogle involuntarily shrank back a:

"You shall!" Farquhar assured him tranquilly, with a slight squaring of his ample shoulders. "When I've finished with the kid. What's your name?" he demanded of the new-comer in an authoritative voice.

"Look alive there! Farquhar doesn't like to be kept waiting," drawled Nugent, an aristocratic, rather vicious looking fellow, with a slight sneer in his voice.

"Hythe," said the little boy, answering him, and not Farquhar.

"Christian name?" this from Farquhar, who resented Nugent's interference.

"Reginald Taunton."

"That's all?" cut in a chubby, pug-nosed individual with a face whose cherubic expression was singularly at variance with his character. "Now my name's only Spratt—but it's got two t's."

"What's your sister's name? Is she as pretty as you?" asked Samborne, a hearty young giant, taller even than Farquhar, if anything. The subtlety of the last question lay in the fact that whether answered in the negative or the affirmative it made its victim appear equally ridiculous.

"I haven't got a sister," answered Reginald Taunton, refusing to be drawn.

"Ever been to school before?" said Farquhar, continuing the catechism.

"Yes," said Hythe. "St. Luke's!"

"Never heard of the place," said Farquhar, ruminating. "What's it like?"

Now as a matter of fact Hythe junior had never felt any particular affection for the establishment in question. But a curious instinct of loyalty made him answer now:

"Not bad!"

"You don't mean that rotten commercial school in Bloomsbury?" exclaimed Nugent, who knew as much about the affairs of the outside world as the rest of St. Osyth's put together.

"It is in Bloomsbury, and it is a commercial school," said its sometime pupil, meeting Nugent's disgusted look squarely enough.

"Do they teach you anything at a show like that? Let's hear you spell 'pigeon' now," said Edwards, a sort of humble hanger-on of Nugent's.

"D-u-c-k!" answered Hythe promptly, whereupon everybody laughed, and Edwards was heard to make audible references to the efficiency of a cricket stump applied externally.

"Why did you leave? Were you kicked out?" asked Giffard, by way of contributing something really pleasant to the conversation.

Hythe didn't answer. Whereupon Giffard gave a playful twist to his arm which made the joints crack.

"*Were* you kicked out though?" demanded Berkeley with a deeply stimulated interest.

"No," said Hythe. "I wasn't."

"Did you leave because the place was too swagger for you, or because you were too swagger for the place?" asked the proud possessor of the two t's to his name, with his beaming smile.

Hythe hesitated a minute and then said, "My father thought he'd rather I came here."

"What price us?" said someone, while a dark, foreign-looking boy named Gegechkory (who had promptly been christened 'Pony' by the first disgusted St. Osythian who had made a shot at his outlandish name), supplied the information that St. Osyth's wasn't a reformatory. He pronounced it reform-at-ory, but the inference was quite clear.

"Is your father rich?" asked Giffard suddenly.

"I don't know," said Hythe junior with truth. "Why?"

"Because the Old Man has a nasty habit of charging five shillings for a new cane every time he swipes you, and putting it down in the bill. If your governor *wasn't* rich it would make things rather awkward, wouldn't it?" said Giffard sympathetically.

"By-the-way, what is your governor?" asked Nugent.

"A tailor," answered Hythe junior.

A sudden hilarious shout greeted the announcement. At another time the subject would not have had any particular interest for anyone, but Mr. Abbot thoughtfully delaying his appearance, and a rag like the present one being infinitely preferable to Greek Unseen, the statement was seized on for all it was worth.

"A what-er?" asked Giffard incredulously.

"A tailor?" repeated the son of the gentleman in question, whose sense of humour appeared to be deficient.

"Did he make the togs you have on now?" asked Edwards inquisitively. Nugent himself, after the unexpected reply, had ceased to take any further interest in the proceedings.

Hythe didn't answer, and again Giffard gave him that finished twist of the arm which seemed to set every bone in the wrong place. Hythe jerked the insulted member away with more strength than Giffard had credited him with.

"Don't lose your temper, Scissors!" said Giffard genially.

"I shan't—Ginger!" promptly retorted the individual so addressed.

The repartee was not a particularly brilliant one, but Giffard's personal appearance was the only asset his victim had to go upon. And it was highly effective, since it

raised a laugh which turned Giffard pink with annoyance. In his secret soul he had always been sensitive on the subject of his locks.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he said, when he could speak. "Here, hold him, somebody, while I kick him!"

There were half a dozen laughing, willing helpers at his service in a moment. Like the rag itself, it was all more or less of a joke to everybody concerned. So while one genial young savage held one arm another equally affable hung on to the other, while Giffard proceeded to kick the quarry with the utmost thoroughness and precision.

"Cry-baby!" said someone, who, although he had not yet spoken, had taken a keen and intelligent interest in the proceedings.

Now a good, healthy booting was all in the day's work to these young Fourth Form barbarians. They themselves had had to put up with such things from their youth upwards. It did the recipient no particular harm, and as a means of instilling into him a salutary sense of his own insignificance, could scarcely be bettered.

Still, it must be admitted that for the victim at least the process was exquisitely uncomfortable. And Hythe junior, though a plucky enough youngster, had only held back the tears by a supreme effort of will. Thus the opprobrious epithet just hurled at him, by

reason of its extreme injustice, was the unkindest cut of all. Involuntarily he raised his eyes to the speaker's face. The latter was pale and hatchet-shaped and belonged to a long, weedy individual, named Noad.

"Like to repeat that little remark of yours, Scissors?" said Gifford, releasing him at last.

"I shouldn't mind, Ginger!" returned his small antagonist obligingly.

"Good man!" said Phillpott under his breath.

When Gifford resumed business, it was not in quite the same playful spirit as before. "Say it again you silly little chump, if you dare!" he cried wrathfully.

"G-i-n-ger!" gasped out the other, the spluttery effort being due to extreme physical discomfort and shortness of breath.

Gifford looked round almost helplessly. With an opponent as obstinate as this what was one to do?

"All right, young Scissors—you wait!" he cried ominously.

But all the same he desisted from his labours, a fact which, all things considered, might be taken to mean a moral victory at least for Hythe junior.

CHAPTER II

COMING EVENTS

All this happened three years before our story opens. During that period the young hopefuls of the Fourth had grown in stature, if not in grace. At the same time the quarrel between the Doctor and the trustees had gone on merrily, and it had now reached its acute stage.

St. Osyth's at this time consisted of four houses. There was a tradition that the Head of the school house, on being asked by a parent for the names of the others, had murmured reflectively, "*Are there others?*" Rightly or wrongly, the saying had been foisted on to Farquhar, who the reader will recollect from the previous chapter. To forget him, indeed, at any time, would have required an effort. He was Captain of the school, Head of the school house, and Captain of the games, a combination of offices which gave him a position as nearly approaching that of lord of the world as modern times have to show. Moreover, he was the Doctor's right hand, as the latter used to say with pride. And when one

remembers those agreeable notions of the Doctor's about bringing up a Prefect in the way he should go, it will be readily understood that Farquhar just now was finding life all that fancy could have painted it. It made the thought that it was his last term doubly hard to bear. He was not due at Sandhurst for another term, really, but his father, who was in India and hadn't seen him for years, had decided that he should go to him for a three months' visit.

As regards the games, the school house fellows were very great guns! Indeed, it would scarcely be too much to say that more colours could have been found amongst them than amongst all the rest of the houses put together. Our old friend Giffard, or "Ginger," for curiously enough the name had stuck to him as obstinately as "Scissors" had stuck to Hythe, had had his long ago. So had Berkeley. So had Gegechkory. The latter was the son of a Polish Count whom the Russian Government had preferred to lodge free of charge in the fortress of Schlüsselburg rather than allow him an opportunity of explaining his candid opinion of them to the world at large. Gegechkory had been in England more than three years now, but he had a curiously un-English way of looking at certain things that came upon St. Osyth's, as a fresh shock each time. Still, there was

a sort of reflected atmosphere of the big world of men and cities about him, which gave him a certain fascination to a great many people.

All these young bucks were prefects, of course, as were also Noad and Hythe. Noad was a "sap" of the first water, and in consequence looked down upon even by the Bleaters. But he was fairly harmless, and on the tacit understanding that he followed their lead on every possible occasion, Farquhar and the rest condescended to let him share something of their reflected glory. The coincidence that they were all Classics, was not quite so strange as it seems. But though there was a sprinkling of Moderns among the rank and file, the Doctor had chosen them with discretion. Needless to say, the lot of the school house Moderns was not a deliriously happy one.

After his first memorable appearance in the Fourth Form class room, the affairs to our hero had to a certain extent hung fire. Hythe *père* had won all along the line, but the Doctor was not without a certain pettiness of character, which inclined him to make the son pay for the victory. Not that he was actually tyrannical, or glaringly unfair, of course, but he certainly did not go out of his way to bring Hythe forward. It was quite a long time before he made him a prefect, even

Noad being singled out for the honour over his head. Yet, in his dogged way, Hythe had availed himself of such educational advantages as St. Osyth's had to offer. But the Doctor not having shouted it from the house-tops, it had passed almost unnoticed, that he had run Farquhar a good second in the examination for the captaincy of the school. It was the same thing with the games, whether unconsciously influenced by the Doctor's attitude, or not, the powers that be had evinced no burning desire to see him cock of the walk in the playing fields. But from not being able to stand up to an over from even a Bleater at cricket, and unable to drop a goal at five yards at footer, he was now a safe bat and a more than decent forward! the change seemed somehow to have escaped the Captain's notice. I don't mean to say of course that if he had been anything out of the way, Farquhar wouldn't have exploited him for the sake of the School, for all he was worth. But with a crowd of other fellows, and those fellows his own chums, all on the same level, it was more than human nature, or at least Farquhar's human nature, was capable of, not to give them the preference. Hythe was quite as good at footer as Gegekory, for instance, yet the latter had his colours, while Hythe had not.

By no stretch of imagination could Hythe

have imagined himself popular at St. Osyth's. Still, he was not actively unpopular, and considering the disparity of his size with that of fellows whom he was fated to go above in class, he was knocked about surprisingly little. Also the Bleaters of his own house, who had appeared at first to think him fair game, were less pressing in their attentions than might have been expected. Perhaps this had something to do with Hythe's increasing bulk, all the time put in at gymnasium and games not having gone for nothing. The school house grandees had got into the way of thinking him considerably smaller than themselves. As it was, even between him and the lordly Giffard there was not so much to choose.

So our hero had really nothing to complain of, and he didn't complain. Whether he occasionally felt a little lonely was another matter. Yet when he returned home each term and his father asked him the same anxious question:

"And how are you finding St. Osyth's now, sonny?" he invariably turned up a bright face and answered:

"Ripping!"

"And you're getting on with the chaps there all right?" his parent would continue.

"Fine!" answered the son veraciously.

Whereupon his father would heave a sigh

of relief and talk about what money could do nowadays, to which "Scissors," always with that nice look of his on his simple-minded papa, would agree without turning a hair.

Though one has given a quite disproportionate space to this description of the School House, its members would have considered it no more than their due. Next to it, both in point of numbers and importance came "Doctor's," so called because it was attached to the Head-master's private residence. At its head was Samborne, who by this time had become a very Hercules in size. Perhaps because he was such a great man at the games, a sort of alliance had been entered into between him and Farquhar, so that Doctor's was on the same sort of terms with the school house that, say, as a friendly colony is with the Mother country. Samborne hadn't many ideas in his head besides the games, but at these he was a nailer. And whether it liked it or not, his house had to follow his lead. Even Spratt, his fellow prefect, whose name, by the way, still contained two t's and who was of a literary, rather than an athletic turn, had been pressed into the service.

Descending the scale, we come to the house of a master named Alexander, whose members had been known from time immemorial as the Hittites. How the name arose, not even

Joseph, the old butler, who at some dim and distant age had started life as a page at St. Osyth's, could have told you. I, too, St. Osyth's faithful chronicler, who on last Speech Day made a special pilgrimage to the lower school to inspect a name (my own) carved with a penknife on a desk in the left hand corner, with a wholly unbelievable date, am as much in the dark as the rest. But no one was under the delusion that the name had been bestowed in any spirit of vain compliment. Unlike Doctor's, the house was not distinguished for its efficiency in games. But it was distinguished for other things which made it rotten to the core. Nugent, its head, had used his uncanny knowledge of the world to affect it with thoroughly vicious tendencies. In this he was ably seconded by Edwards, who toadied to him much in the same way as he had done in the Fourth, for Nugent in his cold, supercilious way had a curious gift of attracting other fellows to him. Edwards would have blacked his boots at any time, while Crichton, the wildest and most reckless of the middle school Hittites, who had been nick-named "The Admirable," "sarcastic like," was always at his heels. It is but just to Nugent to say he accepted their devotion with the profoundest indifference, shaking The Admirable off indeed more often than not. According to old Joseph, the

Hittites had always been "bad 'uns." Under Nugent's rule they were the limit!

Last and least—immeasurably least—was Mr. Yago's, or "Yaegers" as it was called. Here, as we know, the Moderns had always predominated, while the sprinkling of Classics the house contained made no secret of being ashamed of the connection. Ogle, its head, hadn't enough back-bone, moral or otherwise, to lift the place from the slough of despond into which it had fallen, though Phillpott, crabbed old fighting Phillpott, was always at him to do something. As a matter of fact, Ogle was more than half on the other side. He had always had secret yearnings to be taken up by the elect, and was continually making small advances to them, which they systematically ignored. The whole thing used to make Phillpott sick, but it needed a cooler and less peppery fellow than he was to alter the state of affairs. Another sweet arrangement of the seniors of Yaegers was the rule which excluded all Juniors from the Modern side. Its effect on this particular house was to place the Bleaters in the unique position of belonging to a higher caste than their masters.

On the particular day of which we are writing—the day on which it all began to happen—old Joseph appeared at the Captain's study with a preternaturally long face.

"The Doctor would like to see you in his study at once, sir!" he said solemnly.

"All right, Joseph!" nodded Farquhar. Then catching sight of the old servant's expression he added hurriedly: "Anything up?"

"No, sir—that is, yes, sir," answered Joseph, beginning in his public, and ending in his private, capacity and departing, seemingly, in the lowest possible spirits.

Gathering from the above that the interview was not to take a pleasant form, the captain, as he wended his way to the study, went rapidly over current events in his own mind. But with no particular uneasiness—he was far too secure in the Doctor's good graces for anything of that kind. There certainly was that little matter of the juniors talking in chapel the day before yesterday, he reflected. There had been visitors, and the Doctor had frowned upon the delinquents and even come to a perceptible pause in his discourse, without producing any effect on them. Well, the Captain, by the aid of a well-seasoned cane, had known how to remedy that—the Doctor couldn't have anything to grumble about on that score, surely. He had been late for call-over himself several times lately, but a captain has certain necessary privileges, as the Doctor would be the first to admit. With regard to the mild

remonstrances the Doctor had been making lately about the prevalence of swearing in the school, he personally had always gone out of his way to avoid rapping out anything when the juniors were about. As for the latter daring to copy him he would just like to see them at it! Mr. Baker, too, whose fields adjoined the bathing place, had been making himself objectionable about the fellows using a short cut across his land on their way to the river. Well, Farquhar had given him a spice of his mind in return, which he hoped would live in his memory. (It did! with results which have their bearing on this story.) As for the evils of smoking, Farquhar was at one with all the Doctor could say upon that point. A fellow who deliberately did anything calculated to spoil his form at the games ought to be barred. Still if a chap like Nugent who didn't go in for games, although there was a tradition that he could do anything he liked at them, and whose insolent tongue was the one thing on earth Farquhar dreaded, chose to make an idiot of himself that way, and didn't obtrude the fact on his notice officially, where was the use of making a fuss?

Besides, even at the worst, the Captain had always found the Doctor eminently reasonable, and after a little judicious handling, fairly inclined to look at things through his head boy's eyes. So with his usual

nothing-can-go-very-far-wrong-in-this-world-as-long-as-I-am-here-to-look-after-it air, he sounded the dome-like brass knocker, and was ushered into the presence.

At the first sight of the Doctor's face he realised that it was for none of all these things he had been summoned. He realised too, all in a minute, and with the force of a shock, that the Doctor was an old man. His big frame seemed to have shrivelled up and gone to pieces. There were hectic spots of colour on his cheeks, and his mouth had a curious twitching movement which prevented him from speaking very clearly at first. His eyes were so red, too, round the rims, that the Captain had a horrible suspicion that he had been crying.

"Sit down, Farquhar," he said motioning the Captain to a chair. The latter did as he was told and awaited, rather breathlessly, for what was coming.

"I have just received a letter from the trustees," the Head began.

The Captain looked a sympathy that was genuine enough. Like the Doctor he had had a profound detestation of the trustees and their methods.

"They have asked me to send in my resignation," finished the Doctor, quite simply for once.

"Oh, I say sir, what a shame! You won't

though, will you?" cried the Captain with a heartiness it was pleasant to hear.

"No, my boy," the Doctor answered. "The trustees may, or may not, have the power to appoint someone else in my place—I hear they want a Mr. FitzHerbert—but that is a question they will have to settle with my lawyers."

"This Mr. FitzHerbert, sir—whoever he is—must be an awful outsider if he takes the post over your head," said the Captain hotly.

"I know nothing about Mr. FitzHerbert personally—beyond the fact that he is a Cambridge man," said the Doctor with a curious slighting inflection in his voice. "My own sympathies and connections, as you know, have always been with Oxford. But, as I said, I shall never retire voluntarily."

"You'll have the school with you to a man, sir!" said the Captain, and his worst enemy couldn't help liking him just then. "We could get new trustees any day but we could never get another Head-master like you!"

"Thank you, my boy," said the Doctor, a little catch of feeling in his voice. "The school's loyalty I am proud to say has never yet failed me. I have mentioned the matter to you thus early because, in view of my intention to fight the case, it cannot fail to attain a widespread publicity. I should rather you heard

of it first from my own lips. You have my sanction to communicate the whole matter to the school at large."

It would be difficult to imagine a more injudicious way of dealing with a serious situation than the Doctor exhibited just now. No possible good could be gained by this claiming, as it were, the partisanship of his boys, to say nothing of the loss of dignity such a course entailed. But a physical breakdown, the Captain had observed in him for the first time, had not been without a corresponding mental enfeeblement.

To leave St. Cyth's was inexpressibly bitter to him. He had been at its head for more than a quarter of a century, and however much he had let things slide lately, he loved the old place with an enduring love. He loved the great hall with its brave shield in which were set the names of those whom Greater Britain honoured! He loved the quiet cloisters, and the library, and the sound of the young voices as they came up from the distant playing fields. But if these things were to be saved for the next generation, it must be admitted that the trustees had not spoken too soon. It seemed a thousand pities that the old Doctor could not bring himself to accept the way of exit from a position which had become untenable, that their letter suggested.

Needless to say, the Captain left the study feeling even more necessary and important than ever. But being younger and more impressionable than he had any idea of, that pathetic twitching of the Doctor's lip touched him up uncomfortably.

"Poor old chap!" he said to himself. "What terrible rough luck! But we'll see him through."

The monitorial system might have all the advantages the Doctor claimed for it, but as practised in its full beauty at St. Osyth's, it would have been a miracle if it had not turned some fellows' heads. In the Captain's case this miracle had not occurred.

CHAPTER III

THE DEBATING SOCIETY

To have kept the Bleaters from troubling for the space of two whole chapters, devoted to the affairs of St. Osyth's, is a feat of which the present chronicler is justly proud. But though the reader is bound to have more than enough of these festive young gentlemen's company through the course of the story, it might be as well to mention here a few of their most prominent habits and peculiarities.

They appeared to live a life of their own within the larger life of the school. They were always busy, but if they improved the shining hour, it was in ways which made them a profound nuisance to the rest of the world. From the fact that they were all Classics there was remarkably little house rivalry amongst them. But whenever time hung heavy on their hands, or the day was wet, or the vagaries of prefects or masters had got on their nerves, they evened things up by taking it out of the Moderns. The seniors of Yaeger's, being mostly Moderns, and with the exception of Phillpott, a spiritless lot, received the largest share of their

favour. But though Phillpott didn't take things sitting down like the rest, his temper was such that the sport of bear-baiting, in his case, was always attended with a pleasing uncertainty. Thus the invitation, "Come and rag old Phillpott!" invariably met with the most cordial response. In these social amenities the juniors of Yaeger's always took a prominent part. You see, they had never identified themselves with the house at all; they were Classics, banded together against their lawful enemies the Moderns, even though the latter happened to be their own seniors.

Somebody—Spratt, if I remember rightly—used to declare that, as a species, the Bleaters were so much alike that when he called "F-a-g!" he never knew whether the person responding was his own property or not. But in this he was wrong. For among the juniors, as among all other classes of Society, were to be found master minds, inventive and powerful spirits, capable of getting up first class sprees at a minute's notice almost, or of leading a house-master the life of a toad under a harrow. But St. Osyth's juniors were specially fortunate just now in the possession of more than one leader of men. At the school house, as well as Giffard minor, who was a star of great magnitude, were the two Seymour

Sandford twins, who answered to the names of Sandford and Merton indiscriminately. But even their diabolical ingenuity was rivalled by that of Cough-drop—one has to think a minute to remember his real name, which resolves itself from the depths of memory as Ayscough—the undisputed chief of the hopes of Yaeger's, although his friend the trusty adjutant, Mothersole, ran him a good second. Quite the smallest boy in the school belonged to Yaeger's too. His name was Pearson, but from his habit of almost apologising to you for looking at you, and other more or less worm-like qualities, he went by the name of "It."

Among the minor diversions of the Bleaters' lives may be reckoned the Debating Society. Not that the reader may fondly imagine they attended the meetings to discuss the motions, or even to listen to those who did. No, their sole interest lay in the private business, which headed the proceedings. Here, by traditional right, any gentleman in search of information might badger the president with any number of questions which might have some connection with the business in hand, or, on the contrary, might not.

The sport varied, of course, with the character of the president. At the present moment, the office was held by a fellow named Bunge, of Doctor's, who, from the

juniors' point of view, was everything that could be desired. Bunge was one of the best tempered and right-meaning fellows in the world, but he had no more idea of humour than a fly. He simply *couldn't* see when he was being chaffed. He reminded you all the time of a serious-minded baby, but he pulled his weight in the community, nevertheless. At footer, for instance, though there were far showier players in the Second Fifteen, he was so steady and conscientious that the Captain could always rely on him to hold the pack together. A curious trait in a nature so matter of fact as his, was his habit of inveterate novel reading. His father had been on one of the big London papers in those mediæval days when the books were among the reviewers' perquisites. He had thus managed to accumulate a goodly library of light literature, on which in holiday times his son used to browse. The unusual knowledge thus obtained was to have curious results for St. Osyth's in the days to come.

The greatest triumph of Bunge's life had been his election to the presidency of the Debating Society. He was far too simple to see that the office had come to him because nobody else wanted it, and that the rest of the fellows were only too thankful to shovel it off on to his willing shoulders.

There were a few little drawbacks to his

unalloyed enjoyment of it, of course. For one thing, the effort to find any new subject under the sun for discussion nearly turned his hair grey each time. Then so far from welcoming the opportunity to become budding orators, the members turned unaccountably coy when either an hon. proposer or an hon. opposer was wanted. Also the difficulty of compelling an audience to come in was only equalled by the impossibility of persuading it to stop in, when captured. Thus, taken altogether, the president's life could scarcely be called a happy one. But, for all that, Bunge wouldn't have changed places with an emperor.

There was a debate on, the very evening of the Captain's interview with the Doctor. This time, even Bunge had been almost in despair at getting a suitable motion. The last one, "That the Present Tendency of the English Race is to Return to the Land," had interested him very much himself, and he had put in a good deal of time last holidays in getting up the facts. But somehow the topic failed to take St. Osyth's frivolous fancy. As a result, the debate had consisted chiefly of private business. Determined that no such fiasco should occur again, the worthy president betook himself to Spratt, for help. His choice fell on the latter because of his known literary tendencies.

"Look here, Spratt," he began. "Do, like a good chap, put me on to something for the next debate. The last was almost a frost, you know."

Spratt did know, and, unlike Bunge, having a sense of humour, was able to appreciate the force of the "rather." "It was on the Land and that rot, wasn't it?" he returned, thus calmly dismissing the agricultural interests of the country. "Well, why don't you get them on to one of the old wheezes—'That Mary Queen of Scots did not murder Darnley'—sort of thing you know."

"They've had enough of Mary Queen of Scots," Bunge told him sadly. "Philipps (his predecessor) had three goes at her in one term—you can see the minutes."

"Well, what about cars. How'll this do? —'That Motor Cars should be Abolished in the Interests of Humanity,'" asked Spratt, becoming tired of Bunge, and in consequence more helpful.

"Would the fellows be interested in that, do you think?" asked Bunge, a gleam of hope in his eye.

"My dear man, everyone's interested in cars," Spratt assured him. "Everyone hates them poisonously till they get 'em, and after that it's all the other way. Let a chap who's got one at home be the opposer, and if you want a few spicy remarks for the other side

thrown in cheap, find a proposer who's had his uncle, or his great-aunt, or his next female cousin smashed up by one."

"Thanks awfully, Spratt—I will," said Bunge, and departed buoyantly on the quest.

But if on the appointed evening of this particular debate the hall was packed from corner to corner, it was due not so much to the intrinsic value of Spratt's selection, as to a postscript which had been tacked on to the announcement on the notice board by no less a person than the Captain himself. For a good week beforehand, Bunge's notice, in which every curled and measured capital seemed to speak the writer's pride of office, had hung undisturbed. But to-day across its fair and smiling landscape of white paper, ample margin and copybook writing, entirely spoiling the symmetry of the production, came a couple of lines in a writing that was so straight-up-and-down, so heavy, and so unaccommodating that it might have been written with a ramrod instead of with a pen. In its native simplicity it ran thus:—

"All members of the School are to attend the debate this evening, whether they belong to the Debating Society or not."

"F. Farquhar, (Captain)."

The notice attracted crowds round it, as, after second lesson, the school trooped off to the fives courts or playing fields.



"The notice attracted crowds round it, as the school
trooped off to the playing fields."

"It looks like a row!" observed Ayscough to a crowd of his fellow Bleaters. There was distinct hope in his voice.

Half the school was gathered about the board by this time, and Giffard, as a known friend of the Captain's, was waylaid the moment he appeared.

"Here, I say, Ginger old man! what are we to go to the debate for to-night?" they shouted, pressing round him.

"To settle how much longer we're going to stand the racket of other people's cars, of course!" laughed Giffard trying to edge off.

"Don't rag!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Do you know anything about it or not?"

"No," answered Giffard, not laughing any more. "I'll swear I don't! But from the way Farquhar fixed me with his glittering eye when I tried to pump him just now, I should say there are squalls ahead!"

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Samborne, coming up at this minute and reading the notice over the other fellow's heads. "Anything up about the games, I wonder?"

"Perhaps Arundel's sent in a bill for storing the cup for so long!" suggested Spratt amiably. Samborne was a chum of his, but he couldn't resist the little gibe.

The giant threw him a wrathful look. The reference was a painful one. Arundel was St. Osyth's rival, it had been going up in

recent years in about the same ratio that St. Osyth's had been declining in a contrary direction. It lay in the next county, and a famous Cabinet Minister, who was also an old Arundel boy had given a splendid cup to be competed for by the two schools, at the great cricket match of the year. If one were to divulge—which in the interests of St. Osyth's one has no intention of doing—for how many years lately the cup had remained on the wrong side, the force of Spratt's observation would be readily understood.

Nugent strolled up at this point and surveyed the notice with raised eyebrows.

"Farquhar, if possible, is as polite as ever, I see!" he drawled to The Admirable, whom for once in a way he was allowing to hang on his arm. "What a wheedling way the chap has with him!"

Phillpott was standing next to Hythe. It was almost impossible for Phillpott to make advances to anybody. But in his surly way he liked Hythe a good deal more than the latter had any idea of. "Shall you go?" he asked.

Hythe, who had been standing with his hands in his pockets contemplating the board, nodded. "Trust me!" he said. "Even Farquhar wouldn't have the nerve to stick up a notice like that, unless what he had to say was a tearer!"

Bunge, though he had deplored the effacement of his notice, couldn't help feeling immensely pleased when evening came round to find what an audience it had brought. But in place of the inveterate "saps," of the upper and middle school and the swarm of irritating gadflies belonging to the lower, who as a rule were his chief supporters, there was now to be seen, plain to the naked eye, whole shining rows of seniors, and captains of games, and prefects and other great men. It was the proudest moment of the president's life.

Everybody had come early, the little boys because they wanted to get good places, the elder ones because of the indefinable feeling of uneasiness which had got into the air. The sight of old Joseph's ^{sepulchral} visage, besides which that of the melancholy Jacques would have appeared festive, was alone sufficient indication that something was seriously wrong. Whatever it was, they wanted to get it over. They wished Farquhar would hurry up. But then, as Nugent remonstrated with them in his smooth way, royalty is not expected to put in an appearance before its subjects are assembled.

To Bunge, however, had come a sudden blissful thought. Why not utilise all this assembled rank and beauty? Why not start the debate at once and leave the Captain's

tiresome communication, whatever it was, to come afterwards. So, merely remarking, "I will now proceed to read over the minutes of the last meeting," and doing so in a tremendous hurry, he was able to declare the debate opened before the company had had time to take in the situation. When it did it was voluble.

"Arn't we going to have any private business, though?" piped up Ayscough in the midst of the hubbub. He did not see being done out of the simple joys lying to his hands because of the greater, but more problematical ones to come.

Bunge looked at him reproachfully. But he trotted out the old formula, "Has any gentleman any question to ask, before I call upon the hon. mover to bring forward his motion?" with that noble devotion to duty which had always characterised him.

Unfortunately the gentlemen present seemed to be of an especially inquiring turn of mind. And the meeting finding it as good a way of passing the time as any other till Farquhar showed up, settled itself down to listen.

Giffard minor wanted to know if the Balbus who was mentioned so frequently in Arnold was a real or imaginary personage. Bunge thought wholly imaginary, but if it was really necessary to Giffard's happiness to

know, he advised him to go over some of the stock classical literature with the aid of a good translation. Had he ever heard of Bohn? Giffard minor, to whom Bohn was as a dear familiar friend, looked at Bunge to see if he was ragging, and finding he was not, subsided. The Admirable, in the drawl which he copied from Nugent, asked if the president was aware that in speaking of the members of St. Osyth's the townspeople were in the habit of dividing them into the Moderns and the Gentlemen? It was certainly news to the president, who asked with every appearance of lively curiosity, who the speaker thought they could mean by the Gentlemen? On the Admirable's replying rather tartly, "Why, the Classics, of course!" he murmured "Really!" in a tone whose meditateness endeared him to the Moderns for ever. Mothersole wanted to know his candid opinion of hot water ices. Bunge had never tried them himself, but then his digestion was not his strong point, and he always barred ices in any form. Merton, the other Seymour-Sandford twin, was curious to know if Bunge had ever realised that his initials spelt "f-i-b." Bunge said that the coincidence had escaped his notice, but that it was an interesting point. Had the speaker for instance ever noticed that his own initials spelt "a-s-s?"

While Arthur Seymour-Sandford was assimilating this coincidence, there was a sudden stir in the room. Farquhar came in with his big swinging stride, obviously meaning business. But he was not best pleased when Nugent ostentatiously cleared his path for him by toppling his own seat and beaters out of the way with a ceremonious "Way, there!"

Farquhar walked right up to Bunge, almost over him, indeed. For not till that mighty form was all but on him did Bunge recede. There was something funny and pathetic in the way in which, clutching the minutes to him, he only gave up the cherished place of honour at the Doctor's desk, inch by inch.

"Not so much row!" said Farquhar looking round the room.

"But it's private business, Farquhar!" urged Bunge, as though that fact explained everything—as indeed it did.

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Farquhar unkindly.

"What, indeed? Fancy shoving your wretched little business, or my business, or anybody's business in front of *Farquhar's*! You shock me, Bunge!" said Nugent coolly.

"Couldn't we have the debate first, Farquhar?" Bunge pleaded wistfully. "It's

on motors you know—' That in the Interests of Humanity——' "

Farquhar put him aside as though he had been a fly. Then he smote with his fist on the desk in front of him.

"I've something to tell you!" he said.
"The Doctor's been kicked out!"

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTER

There was a silence that could be felt in the room. It seemed to last quite a long time. And when the buzz of voices broke out afresh there was a certain hushed note in them. It made some of the little boys feel as though they were in chapel.

Nugent was the first to speak. "Now that Farquhar has finished breaking it gently to us," he said, "perhaps he wouldn't mind explaining!"

"That's just what I am doing!" Farquhar declared angrily. He had thought his unvarnished opening rather neat himself, but things never looked quite the same after Nugent had tinkered with them. And with all his cock-sureness, the Captain was conscious of having a stiff bit of work in front of him. He wanted to hold as good a brief for the Doctor as he could. But he was hampered in two ways—one by the presence of the juniors, which prevented him from giving his opinion of the trustees in the limpidly plain language he would otherwise have employed, and for another by the

natural healthy instinct, which he shared with the rest of his kind, against anything like sentimentalism. Not all the talking in the world would have bound him so securely to the old Doctor's cause as the physical weakness he had detected in him just now, but then he wouldn't have admitted that to himself, much less to the school. Still the same objection did not apply to his making public the sins and wickednesses of the trustees. And Farquhar made them very plain indeed.

"The Doctor's been kicked out right enough!" he told them. "I've just been in to talk it over with him. He asked me to tell you fellows. It's crocked him up frightfully. He said the school had always stood by him in the past. I answered for you all, of course, and said it would be the same in the future, and that he could count on having us behind him, whatever happened."

St. Osyth's had by this time slightly recovered from the state of stupefaction, and from every side there came cheers which would have done the Doctor's heart good to hear.

"But what's he got kicked out *for*?" asked Giffard, slightly dazed still. That a fellow could be bunked came of course within his range of comprehension, but that such a thing could happen to a master, and a Head-

master, and that Head-master Doctor Armstrong made him feel that the solid earth was reeling under his feet.

"Because he's tried to keep St. Osyth's decent," answered the Captain bitterly. "It's all those beastly trustees, of course. They've always had their knife into him since he stuck out against having a Modern Side here. The brutes scored against him there, worse luck; but since then he's stood them out in a heap of other shoddy things they've tried to foist on the school."

"Thank's awfully!" Phillpott shot out at him in an apoplectic tone.

The Captain took no notice of him. "The Doctor's not going to let them down him, all the same, though!" he went on. (Cheers!) "He is going for them for all he's worth," (More cheers, and a voice "Never say die!") "and what we've got to do, is to see that he keeps his end up."

The cheers that followed made the rafters of the old hall ring again. While they were still echoing Gegechkory sprang to his feet, his big black eyes shining with excitement. "But it is a tyr-r-any!" he cried. His English was always rather sketchy, and in moments of stress both his words and his pronunciation were apt to get mixed. "And the trustees, have they then the power to make the good Doctor do his packing?"

"That's just what he's got to find out, Pony," answered the Captain. He spoke slowly as one would to a child. It was part of his pleasant little English way to treat all foreigners as if they were more or less imbeciles. Even with Gegechkory, who he admitted to a certain amount of intimacy, he was just the same. "He is going to law with them," he condescended to explain in the same slow-march way.

Gegechkory spread out his hands, palms upwards, with an altogether indescribable gesture. "But the law!" he remarked, giving the word much the same intonation that the Captain's voice had dropped to in speaking to him. He then sat down, having apparently found food for reflection in the explanation.

"The Doctor always was a good sort," said Berkeley ruminating aloud. "Besides, we're used to him. And anyway, whoever else we get is safe to be a jolly sight worse!"

The idea of a successor to the Doctor came upon the assembly as a fresh shock. As Berkeley said, they were so used to him, that the idea of anybody else in his place was almost beyond their power of imagination.

"Are they thinking of anyone else?" came at Farquhar, from all sides.

"They're thinking of a fellow named FitzHerbert. And a pretty unspeakable cad

he must be not to tell them he is not taking any under the circumstances," answered Farquhar. "He's a Cambridge man too!" he added, a world of contempt in his voice.

"But we're Oxford! We have no use for a Cambridge chap here!" chimed in Ogle.

"Well, he might be worse, he might be a Modern, you know!" observed Spratt, by way of consolation. Whereat Ogle flushed, and a murmur as of muttered thunder came up from the benches where the senior members of Yaeger's were congregated.

So far, all contributions to the discussion had come from the seniors. Under Farquhar's rule most school meetings did take this form; he was a strict believer in the adage that Bleaters should make themselves as scarce as possible on all occasions, and be heard never.

Still, the news was so unexpected, and so altogether staggering, that it would have needed something stronger even than their awe of the Captain, to have kept them quiet any longer. Everyone had something to remark, to suggest, or to ejaculate. It was while the tempest was at its height that Hythe rose to his feet.

They were so little used to his putting himself forward in any way, that in sheer astonishment everyone stopped to listen. But he didn't seem at all embarrassed, even

though the captain's look could hardly be called encouraging.

"What do you mean by the Doctor's being kicked out Farquhar?" he asked.

"What I say!" Farquhar retorted curtly.

A good many of the little boys tittered. They were used to being flayed by Farquhar themselves, but it was distinctly agreeable to see a senior subjected to the same process.

It seemed to have very little effect on this particular senior, though. "Do you mean that he's got to go, or that they've asked him to go on his own?" he persisted.

Farquhar turned his gaze upon him with an effect of being astonished he still existed. "They've asked him to send in his resignation, if that's what you mean!" he retorted ungraciously; "but it comes to the same thing. He won't, and we're going to see him through!"

"Right O! Hurrah!" yelled the little boys. They were fast working themselves into a perfect fever of loyalty to the Doctor, although, as a matter of fact, their interest in him up to this point had been distinctly tepid. But he was the Doctor, after all, and being as much a part of their possessions as the big clock, they resented bitterly any attempt at outside interference.

"How're we going to work it, though?" asked Spratt soberly.

But Farquhar, as usual, felt quite equal to the situation. "The thing to do," he said, "is for us to write to the trustees ourselves!"

Nobody said anything for a minute. They had all got into the way of accepting Farquhar at his own valuation, and letting him run things for them, but this was going rather a long way. However, after the first shock, it was wonderful how well the idea took. It was also significant that it seemed specially to commend itself to the rowdiest part of the audience. The Admirable, for instance, applauded so vigorously with his feet on the calves of the boy immediately in front of him, that Farquhar threatened his removal.

"Who'll write it?" asked Nugent, when the disturbance caused by the little incident had died down. His tone was slightly uneasy.

"Why, me!" answered the Captain in unaffected amazement, while from all parts of the room came shouts of, "Why, Farquhar, of course!"

Nugent shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly, but he didn't say any more. The probabilities are, that it wouldn't have made any difference if he had.

"I'll dash it off now, if you like," said Farquhar, taking up some sheets of the school notepaper which lay in one of the pigeon-holes of the Doctor's desk.

They did like. They received the offer with effusion. Ayscough fussily presented the oracle with a pen, and Giffard minor scooped an ink-pot out of its well, with the results that usually attend ill-judged haste. Much to their chagrin, however, Farquhar ignored these delicate attentions and made shift with his own stylo. But just as he was knitting his Jove-like brows in the effort to get hold of a good introduction, the voice of Hythe made itself heard once more.

"Half a jiff before you start, Farquhar!"

"Here's our knight of the thimble again!" exclaimed Nugent in genuine surprise.

"Why this prattling, my Scissors?" Giffard jeered.

"Well, somebody's got to speak!" answered the gentleman so designated, in the most matter of course way in the world.

"I like that. What have we been doing all along, then?" demanded half a dozen voices.

"Not saying any of the things I'm going to, or I shouldn't have to take the job on!" Hythe told them good-humouredly. He stopped for an instant to glance at Farquhar, but the latter, nibbling thoughtfully at the end of his fountain-pen, didn't even seem to know he was speaking.

But Hythe refused to be snubbed. If his hands were clenched rather tightly, they were

in his pockets, so that nobody was any the wiser. And his manner was so easy that he might have been discussing the weather prospects with a group of friends.

"Look here, you chaps! don't you think it rather a bad tip to put the trustees' backs up at the start?" he asked persuasively.

"Because, as long as they haven't actually given the Doctor his marching orders, there is always a fighting chance of his being able to patch it up with them."

"But the Doctor's as good as said that he counted on us to stand by him, you silly oaf!" stormed the Captain, forgetting that he wasn't listening.

"I daresay he's waxy enough to say anything to-day—anybody would be!" Hythe conceded tolerantly, "but when he's had time to cool down, he'll perhaps wish he hadn't. He's smoothed the trustees over before now—but once they've set eyes on that letter the Doctor may as well shut up shop."

"You're a judge of shops, aren't you?" asked the Captain with an unworthy sneer.

Hythe bore up wonderfully under this brilliant fusilade. Indeed, so little affected by it did he seem, that some of Farquhar's followers began to be afraid that it had escaped his notice.

"Farquhar says you're a judge of shops, Hythe!" sniggered Noad.

"Yes," said Hythe. "I heard him!"

"We noticed you didn't laugh, though!" hinted Nugent. "Didn't you think it funny?"

"Topping!" answered Hythe.

"Farquhar's humour always is as delicate as that!" explained Nugent in his insolent way. "That's why we love him so. Now with most great wits, one feels like throwing things at them all the time."

"There's a chance for you, then!" returned Hythe stolidly.

Nugent, in spite of himself, looked rather taken aback. "Is that because I called you my knight of the thimble? Hope you didn't mind?" he drawled.

"Well, hardly!" answered the other.

Anything cooler or more unconcerned than his voice it would have been difficult to imagine. But Nugent gave him a longer look from beneath his supercilious eyelids than he favoured most people with.

Farquhar's temper had been rising steadily during this little interchange of courtesies. He left Nugent alone, but his manner to Hythe could not well have been worse.

"The Doctor's never cottoned to you from the first—we all know that!" he sneered. "You've probably your own reasons for not wanting the letter to go—and it's not hard to understand what they are. That about the

trustees patching it up's all bunkum. Do you take us for fools?"

"I usen't to," Hythe assured him calmly.

Ayscough was misguided enough to laugh, but he wished he hadn't afterwards, when he saw the look on the Captain's face. And that Hythe's interference wasn't popular could be gathered from the cries of "Sit down!" "Dry up!" "Let Farquhar get on with the letter!" "Down with the trustees!" "Three cheers for the Doctor!" etc. etc.

Farquhar, who had literally turned his back upon his opponent, devoted himself for the next few minutes to the cares of solid literature. He had always had a great facility for knocking off verses or prose, and the present effusion, such as it was, was finished in less time than one could have believed possible.

"How'll this do?" he asked, and proceeded to read it aloud.

"To the Trustees of St. Osyth's"

"Sirs,—

"Having heard that you have asked Dr. Armstrong to send in his resignation, we wish most earnestly to point out to you the extreme undesirability of his taking any such step. We should like to state that in our opinion Dr. Armstrong is an excellent Head-master, admirably suited to his position in every way. We have heard also that you contemplate offering the post to a Mr. FitzHerbert. We

cannot imagine any gentleman accepting the offer under the circumstances, but in the case of Mr. FitzHerbert, the fact that he is a Cambridge man would alone prove a serious disqualification. We are forced to the conclusion that you cannot have realised how strongly St. Osyth's interests are bound up with Oxford. Thus, while thinking it only right to let you know that under no circumstances could Mr. FitzHerbert's appointment be received here without serious opposition, we trust that this letter will enable you to realise the grave mistake you have in contemplation, and will result in the complete reinstatement of Dr. Armstrong. "

"How's that?" repeated the author, but as one sure of his answer.

"Jolly good!" "Ripping!" "That ought to make them sit up, if anything will!" the audience assured him. But there was a funny little laugh on Spratt's face, while Nugent looked distinctly worried.

"How're you going to sign it?" Samborne inquired.

"You were going to put Farquhar on to a 'Yours respectfully,' weren't you, Scissors?" grinned Griffard.

"No," Hythe reassured him. "It might give them a knock, you know—coming after the rest."

"Who's going to sign it?" asked a member

of the Middle School, scenting a chance of bringing himself before the eyes of the world for once.

But Farquhar did not encourage him in his budding aspirations. "I was going to sign it for the lot," he declared. "But perhaps the prefects had better lump in their names as well," he added, with a question in his voice.

"Seems sound," said Nugent drily. "Besides, it might remind 'em that we exist, you know!"

Farquhar looked at him as though he would have liked to say something. But though he restrained the impulse, the effect on his temper was such that his cast-iron signature seemed to take up half the page. Giffard and the rest of the school house grandees signed next, and Noad was just going to pass the paper on to Doctor's when to everyone's stupefaction, Hythe stretched out his hand for it.

"What d'you want it for?" asked Noad. He held on to the precious document, apparently under the impression that Hythe had some fell designs on it.

"Why, to sign it. What d'you think I wanted it for, you duffer?" Hythe retorted.

"Am I to let him have it, Farquhar?" said Noad, still clinging on to the treasure.

The Captain nodded. In his heart he was not sorry at the turn of events. Hythe's opposi-

tion had been as unwelcome as it was unexpected, and this public climbing-down, therefore, had something distinctly soothing about it.

"You've changed your mind rather quickly, haven't you?" he scoffed, while someone made audible references to trimming, and someone else put forward certain applied data on the subject of turncoats.

"I don't know so much about that," Hythe answered them composedly. "But as I can't stop the thing being sent, I'd rather take my dose with the rest of you. Here, Coughdrop, lend us that pen."

Ayscough, as we know, had intended the instrument in question for more illustrious hands, but he acceded to the request like a lamb; afterwards, he wondered why.

Nugent was staring at Hythe in the oddest way. "I don't see where you come in—about signing, I mean," he declared.

"You wouldn't!" Hythe retorted with a short, rather bitter laugh. He affixed his signature, blotted it deliberately, and passed the paper on to Samborne.

A diversion amid the proceedings arose when Edwards, being the last of the Hittite prefects to sign, made a motion to hand the paper back to Farquhar.

"Here, I say, what about us! Aren't we to sign, then?" Ogle protested.

"I suppose so," consented the Captain grudgingly.

"It would serve you jolly well right if we didn't!" growled Phillpott, his every pen-stroke seeming to splutter with indignation.

"I don't care a hang whether I sign the thing or not!" fumed Malet, signing nevertheless. He was a Modern, a member of Yaeger's, and a very decent fellow really. Indeed, if he had belonged to any other house, he might even have made his mark in the community. But some natures need appreciation to bring them out, and from being constantly looked down upon, Malet's self-respect had rather gone to the wall. It was a long time since St. Osyth's had seen him kick over the traces even to the present extent.

"I shan't sign!" said Curwen quietly. Like Malet he was a prefect of Yaeger's. He came of a family of artists, and was an artist himself to his finger-tips. He could make you a sketch of, say, the ripe red wall of Farmer Baker's orchard, till you could almost have eaten the peaches, or hit off a whole moving wriggling pack of forwards, on the back of an old exercise book, till the very paper seemed alive.

He was always at it, in school and out of school, and from having so many resources in himself, had never seemed to care about

Yaeger's one way or another. But the remarks with which he now proceeded to electrify the meeting, showed that there had indeed been "a chiel amang them takin' notes." They also showed that some of Farquhar's pretty little speeches had gone home.

"I shan't sign it!" he repeated. "I've no quarrel with the Doctor, but I've nothing to be particularly grateful to him for, either. He hasn't wanted us, and he hasn't been at all shy of showing it—Farquhar's about right in that. Well, that sort of thing isn't good enough for me! The trustees probably know what they're about. As for sending this precious letter, half you chaps don't cotton to the idea really. But Nugent doesn't care, and Spratt thinks he sees a rag in it, and the rest of you funk going against Farquhar. Hythe's the only one who's got the pluck to speak up. The letter's so bumptious you could hang your hat on it. And except for getting you into a fiendish row, it'll be an out-and-out fizzle!"

The meeting gaped.

"But Hythe's signed it!" said the first person to recover his breath.

"He's built that way—I'm not!" Curwen affirmed, and sat down in his monumental selfishness, a sight for prefects and fags.

"But we shall all be in the same boat,"

said Edwards, a tinge of nervousness in his tone.

"Not me!" Curwen assured him.

The meeting fell upon him bodily at that, of course. And Farquhar had to assert all his authority, and the rest of the seniors some muscular strength, before peace was restored. But even then, the atmosphere was so electric that after a few minutes Farquhar thought it better to give the signal for dismissal.

But Bunge's face, when he saw what was happening, was a picture.

"But the debate, Farquhar!" he urged. "You've been interrupting it all this time you know, and it's on motors—'That in the Interests——'"

"Oh, shut up, you double-dyed idiot!" exclaimed the Captain, in a voice which rather proved that if the events of the evening had done nothing else, they had at least ruffled his temper.

CHAPTER V

MAN DISPOSES

I have managed to give you a very poor idea of Farquhar's character if you imagine for one moment that any little objections raised by such insignificant individuals as Hythe or Curwen deterred him from sending the letter. He posted it the same evening, fixing on the stamp without a tremor.

There, to all intents and purposes the matter seemed to have ended. The trustees, though they must have received the document, gave no sign of being overcome by admiration of its contents, or the reverse. The Captain, who rather expected a reply by return, put down the delay to "their beastly bad form," and waited, with a self-confidence which it is refreshing even to think of, for the development of events.

It was a wretched week for everybody. On some days the Doctor read prayers, and took the sixth form in Greek, as usual, but more often than not he relegated these duties to Mr. Warre, the second master. When he was present, the school went in an uneasy terror of his breaking down, which kept

everyone's nerves on the jangle, while, when he absented himself, the thought of the alarms and excursions in which he might be taking part was equally disturbing. Then, too, some of the little boys, not being blessed with Farquhar's engaging assurance, had occasional nightmarish recollections of Curwen's pleasant little speech, and his cheerful prophecy of the "fiendish row" to come. And in the seclusion of the detention room, or on being wakened up in the middle of the night by a personal tooth-ache, or a neighbourly snore, or even after getting a letter from home, more than one valiant young rebel asked himself doubtfully what "Scissors" had meant by that idiotic speech of his about "taking his dose with the rest." Needless to say, everyone's temper wore a little thin.

Then there came a day when the trustees appointed a meeting with the Doctor in town, and the old man went to make a last desperate effort to do what St. Osyth's called "keep his end up." The school's informant as usual was Farquhar, who, as the recipient of so much head-masterial confidences, felt himself a triton among the minnows.

It speaks well for the old school after all that during this time, when they might have done so with comparative impunity, its members refrained from indulging in the more striking forms of crime. There was a vague

feeling in the air that any such course of conduct would be unsportsmanlike, although it would have been contrary to every canon of decent reserve to have put such things into words. But when the members of a big public school hold their hands, from a feeling that the arbiter of their destinies is not in a position to hit back, it is a sure proof that there is something very rotten indeed in the state of Denmark.

The strain told on everyone. It even, for the time being, weakened the ties of family and affection. For instance, Sandford being entrusted by Merton with a threepenny-bit, a penny of which he was to spend on bicycle oil in the village shop (Merton himself being unfortunately gated, for the paltry reason that he had taken somebody else's corrected French exercise as a model for his own) brought back the change in milk-chocolate, most of which had been bestowed in a too inside pocket, to be returned.

Then Mothersole, when he discovered his cherished white mice, which had hitherto enjoyed a retired and blameless existence in the shelter of his desk, disporting themselves on the floor of the junior class room, in Mr. Yago's direct line of vision, was moved to accuse Ayscough, the friend of his bosom, of carelessness, if not worse, in the matter. Ayscough responded in the only way possible,

of course, but the sight of these tried and trusted comrades, standing up to each other like two little bantam-cocks, would alone have been enough to prove to the initiated that the times were out of joint.

"Fighting again!" exclaimed Ogle, the next day, when, on turning a corner of the quad with Phillpott, he ran full-tilt into the defendant of the action, who was also his own fag, and noted the variegated state of his visage.

"You should just see the other chap's face, and then you wouldn't think anything of mine," retorted Ayscough, airily.

The mere idea of thus tempting providence in the shape of a prefect, would have made a well brought up junior shake in his shoes. That Ayscough could do so and live, and even wink at two small boys standing by, didn't say much for Ogle's hold on the reins. And, indeed, if Phillpott hadn't happened to be with him, it is more likely than not that he would have let the incident pass.

"What cheek! And from your own fag too!" said Phillpott. "You're never going to stand it, are you?"

"Of course I'm not!" returned Ogle, though rather as if he wished Phillpott far enough. "Suppose you go to Farquhar, you young sweep! and see what he's got to say about it."

"Why on earth don't you settle the little animal yourself!" cried Phillpott. "What's the good of letting those school-house beggars think we can't run our own show?"

"What shall I tell Farquhar you've sent me to him for, Ogle?" inquired Ayscough, beginning to enjoy himself. He had no intention of putting in the proposed visit, you may be sure, but long acquaintanceship with Ogle, if it had done nothing else, had at least shown him how to evade his more objectionable mandates.

"Why, for——" began Ogle, and then stopped, while a grin began to spread itself about the small boy's mouth.

No, on second thoughts, Ogle decided that he would prefer that Farquhar should remain in ignorance of the exact lengths to which a shrimp like Ayscough could go with him. His face puckered into a frown, whose giving-in qualities the brilliant tactician before him was quick to read.

"Please, Ogle, I'm very sorry, and I'll never-do-it-again-if-you-let-me-off-this-time," he rattled off in a voice which he didn't take the trouble to make even decently penitent.

"See that you don't, then," said Ogle, plainly relieved. "But if I ever catch you at it again, I'll——"

But whatever terrible retribution he had in his mind will never be known, because

Asycough scuttled off with his tongue in his cheek, and Phillpott turned disgustedly away.

It was on Thursday that the blow fell. Mr. Warre read prayers that morning with a face so grave and sad that the boys knew without being told that some real trouble was hanging over them. Afterwards he assembled them in the hall to break the news. But even in the short walk from the chapel it had leaked out. The Doctor was dangerously ill. Almost immediately after his interview with the trustees he had had a stroke, and now lay hovering between life and death.

One knows the sick feeling that comes over one on hearing news of that kind. The seniors took it with set faces, and with eyes down on their desks. The little boys went pale. "It" of Yaegers began to cry.

"Isn't he going to get better, sir," he asked hysterically.

"I trust so, my boy," answered Mr. Warre, trying to keep his voice steady; "the doctors have not entirely given up hope."

The school dispersed to spend a miserable day. Nobody talked much, and in the little they did say, they steered clear of the one topic that was in all their minds. The whole thing was too sudden and too shocking. The sight of the Doctor's empty desk, or his vacant place in chapel, brought a lump to their throats. Yet so little did any of this

show in their outward demeanour, that a stranger might have called them unfeeling, and would have been well within his rights in calling them glum.

Then the atmosphere lightened a little. The bulletins got more hopeful, and about a week afterwards Mr. Warre assembled them in hall again, the good news on his lips and face.

"The Doctor is out of danger," he told them. "And it is hoped he will soon be well enough to be moved to the south of France."

"Won't he be coming back here, then, sir?" asked Farquhar.

Mr. Warre started. The question showed that the school had not yet realised that the Doctor was a broken man, who for the rest of his life would be more or less of an invalid. He shook his head without speaking.

"Not ever, sir?" Farquhar persisted.

"No, never, I fear, Farquhar," Mr. Warre told him. "I'm afraid we must give up all hope of that. His recovery alone would be a long business, and even then, I fancy, the doctors will always insist on his spending the best part of the year in a warm climate."

He looked fearfully cut up as he spoke. He was not very young himself, and for many years the Doctor and he had been friends as well as colleagues. Not that the second master had ever shut his eyes to the fact that

the machinery of the school was getting badly out of gear. But he had no power of initiative in himself, and would have been as helpless as a child to set things right, even if the Doctor had tolerated his interference. He could follow a defined line with most admirable fidelity, but it was rather in the spirit of a Chinese tailor, who on being given an old coat for a pattern, copies its patches in the new garment. The school liked Mr. Warre, as, indeed, it would have been difficult not to like anyone so kind-hearted and easy-going as he was, but his hold over them, depending as it did entirely upon their affections, was of a precarious nature.

"And now, boys," he said, and there was as much appeal as command in his voice, "I know I can trust you to be as quiet and orderly as possible until the new arrangements are completed, that is, of course, until the new Head-master arrives."

"Can you tell us who he is, sir," the Captain asked.

"Yes," answered Mr. Warre, "I think there can be no harm in my doing that. His name is FitzHerbert—the Mr. FitzHerbert whose translation of Euripides is one of the finest things in the language, and whose 'Side Lights on English Literature,' has created such a stir lately."

But once he had uttered the name, his after

explanations fell on deaf ears. The Captain looked as black as a thunder-cloud, and even Mr. Warre, unobservant as he was, was struck by the sudden lowering of a good many brows.

"Was Mr. FitzHerbert coming in any case, sir—before this happened, I mean?" the Captain asked.

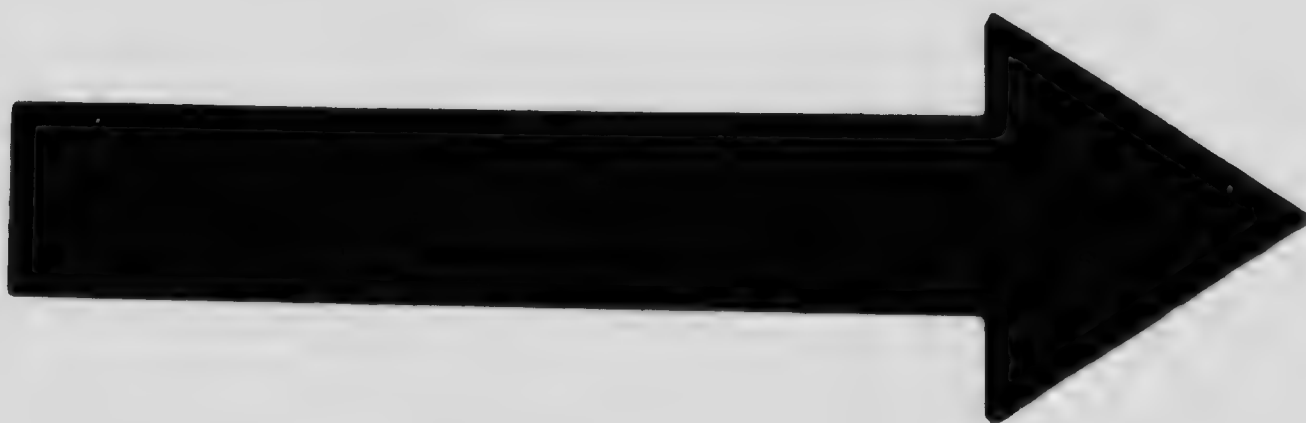
"I don't understand you, Farquhar," answered Mr. Warre rather shortly. "What do you know about the matter?"

"We know that the trustees had offered the post to the—gentleman—you mention, sir," said the Captain, giving the words an emphasis which Mr. Warre found sufficiently surprising.

"Who told you anything about it?" asked the master, visibly annoyed.

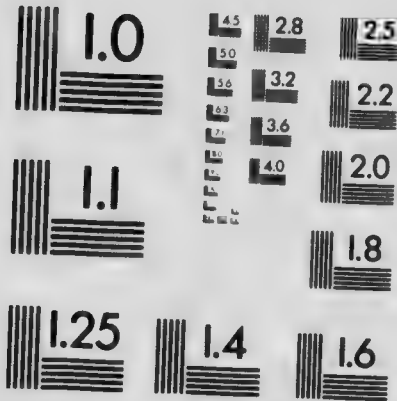
"The Doctor, sir," answered Farquhar.

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Warre. Involuntarily he made a little clucking sound with his tongue against his teeth, which said as plainly as possible what a pity it was. But as he couldn't, in any case, have commented on the Doctor's unwisdom before his present audience, and as this clearly was not the time to do so, he gave up the situation as altogether beyond him. Making no comment then, good or bad, on Farquhar's statement, he hastily reiterated his somewhat Utopian belief that they would all give as little trouble as possible, and dismissed them.



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Getting into a fresh air again, the school involuntarily heaved a sigh of relief. It was as though the pressure of an icy hand had been removed from them. They were sorry for the Doctor, of course, but now that the worst was over, they wanted to throw off all this weight of depression as quickly as they could. The buoyancy of their years made this only too easy. Also, it goes without saying, that somebody was bound to pay for the unnatural heights of virtue to which they had risen during the preceding week. Unfortunately for everyone, themselves included, the scapegoat they fixed upon was Mr. FitzHerbert, and at the moment when his name was in everybody's mouth, he was brought still more prominently under their notice by the action of the trustees.

Looking back with the eyes of matured experience, one realises that the days when the Doctor lay between life and death must have been very trying to the trustees. Being sensible men of the world, they did not take undue blame to themselves in the matter. Still, the Doctor's stroke had followed immediately after his interview with them, and there had been more heated argument on both sides than was strictly necessary. With Farquhar's letter in their hands, the trustees had openly accused the Doctor of having taken the boys into his confidence on matters which clearly

did not come within their province, with the idea of using their partisanship as a weapon. The Doctor did not deny this, although he disclaimed any knowledge of the letter, whose contents, indeed, must have come upon him like a bolt from the blue. But what he *did* admit was quite enough. The trustees had proceeded to make remarks, which were true enough, perhaps, but which in the light of later events they could not help feeling might have been kinder. Of course, even if the worst had happened, they would none of them actually have felt that the responsibility of the Doctor's death lay at their door, but things being as they were, they were profoundly thankful that it was not to be the worst.

As far as the Doctor's reputation was concerned, his illness was the best thing that could have happened. The trustees magnanimously buried the hatchet, and gave out to the world that his resignation was the result of his illness. Thus the old man marched out, as it were, with all the honours of war, and was the object of much gratifying public and private sympathy.

But the anxiety the trustees had undergone did not dispose them to deal too lightly with the authors of the letter. The one and only course to be pursued in the matter was unanimously agreed upon between them, and

the chairman, who was something of a humorist, undertook to make it known to the youthful scribes without delay.

The communication came in such a big, official, red-sealed envelope that it quite bulged out from the rest of the letters in the school letter rack. Its presence there drew the eye of Giffard minor, and he took the trouble to turn it over. It was addressed to the Captain of St. Osyth's, and that alone was sufficient to convey to the Captain's young fag that its import concerned the school. Nor did it take him long to arrive at the illuminating conclusion that this was the letter they were all waiting for. Natural curiosity, therefore, suggested that he should deliver it in person. It was Farquhar's ill-luck that he should have chosen the time of all others when that gentleman, on his way to the playing fields, was entertaining his friends with his candid opinion of events in general, and the new Doctor in particular.

"Didn't you notice that Mr. Warre as good as owned that he meant to bag the post in any case?" he asked. "Well, that settles the sort of cad he is."

"FitzHerbert's a good name, though!" observed Nugent thoughtfully. "Wonder if he belongs to the Staffordshire branch?"

Farquhar merely snorted. "Who cares?" he said. "If he was a whole genealogical

tree himself, we've no use for the brute here, and we've got to show him so."

"I thought you said last week we'd got to stop his coming—but he seems to be turning up as large as life," Nugent reminded him unkindly.

Before Farquhar could reply Giffard minor ran up with the letter. "For you, Farquhar," he said, as one who would imply that in performing this simple service he had been solely actuated with the desire to make himself useful.

Afterwards, of course, Farquhar wished that things had happened differently, but the quickness with which a London crowd collects is as nothing to the motor-car speed with which a whole army of boys can roll up from the playing fields. And almost before Farquhar's thumb had torn open the flap of the envelope the news had gone round, and "Read it aloud, Farquhar!" "Spout it out, old chap!" resounded from all sides.

For his sins, Farquhar complied. At the moment indeed, no dictates of prudence suggested to him that it might be as well to peruse the letter in the privacy of his own study. The trustees, of course, had been guilty of a sad lack of manners in delaying their reply so long, but he was quite prepared to accept any apology they might have to offer in a reasonable spirit. And so unsuspecting

was he of anything likely to affect himself disagreeably in the contents, that he read the letter right through aloud, although it must be admitted with a face which got more and more disturbed as he proceeded.

It was written from the chairman's own address. Farquhar knew him slightly at home, and had once been down to his place for a day's shooting with a relative. Afterwards, when he came to think things over, the probabilities of his people's cognisance in the matter, did not help to make things pleasanter.

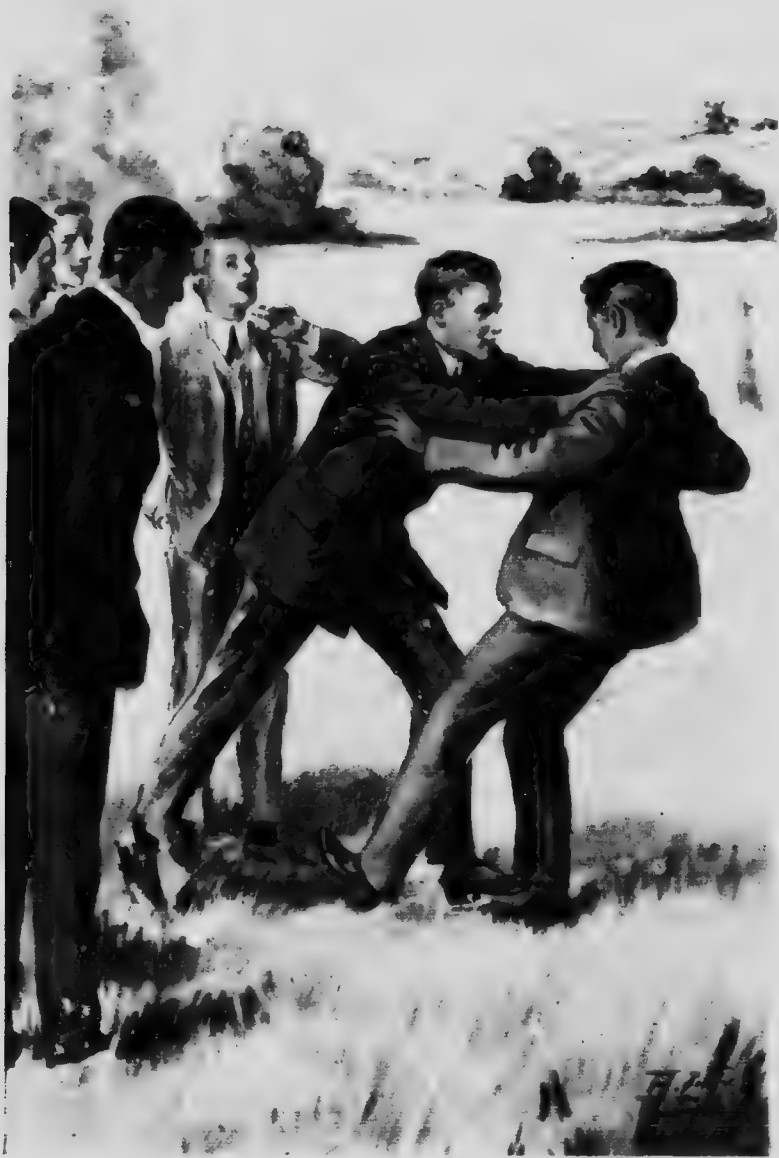
"BRAITHWAITE TOWERS."

"'The Captain of St. Osyth's.'"

"'Sir,

"'The trustees of St. Osyth's have received a letter purporting to be written by the Captain and prefects of St. Osyth's, in the name of the school. As they cannot for one moment believe that such an immature production can have been the work of a senior, they are forced to regard it as a hoax, perpetrated by some of the younger members of the school. They have therefore handed it over to the new Head-master, in the confident assurance that he will take a *feeling* method of bringing home to the writers its officious impertinence.'"

The word "*feeling*" was underlined, and in its beauty of touch cannot fail to remind the reader of that other memorable epistle, written



"The next minute the Captain's hands were on him, and he was being shaken in a way that made his teeth chatter."

in the interests of Mr. Hughes, which had so stung the poor Doctor up two years before. Farquhar's face, usually a clear tan, went as much like a damask rose as human skin can show.

"What are they driving at?" he asked blankly.

"Here, Bunge! you're a glutton for novels, arn't you? Who wrote 'The Seats of the Mighty?'" asked Nugent, with seeming irrelevance.

"Gilbert Parker," answered Bunge promptly.

"Why do you want to know, Nugent?"

"Well, Farquhar seemed rather screeching for the information," Nugent informed him, with a careless wave of his hand in the Captain's direction.

"Were you, Farquhar?" asked Bunge innocently. "You're sure you don't mean the 'Mighty Atom,' because that's written by——"

The next minute the Captain's hands were on him, and big fellow as he was, he was being shaken in a way that made his teeth chatter in his head.

"What's that for?" he asked, wriggling himself away, in a voice whose indignation was only equalled by its stupefaction.

"Why, for calling Farquhar a 'mighty atom,' of course," Nugent obligingly explained.

Everyone who wasn't laughing was trying not to. Bunge's face of injured innocence against Farquhar's furious one was too funny. Besides, St. Osyth's always had had a keen nose for a nick-name.

Here Curwen made a diversion. Whether he was emboldened by Farquhar's momentary set-back, or whether having found his tongue on a previous occasion he was determined to give it exercise, is a moot point, but, at any rate, he now proceeded to express himself in his peculiarly happy vein.

"Well, I'd sooner it was you than me! That letter ought to come in handy for the new Doctor. It will show him who his friends are at the start, and the trustees are so waxy they'll back him up in anything he likes to do. That about thinking it was the kids, is all balderdash. They're only saying it to rub it in what silly asses you were to write it, and what a rotten letter it was. And anyone could have told you they'd cut up rough over a thing like that, couldn't they?"

But Hythe, who was standing next to him, and at whom he appeared to direct the question, didn't give him the support he expected.

"It's so jolly easy to preach, after the thing's done," he said in his even way.

Curwen appeared to ponder over the remark without being offended. "I preached be-

fore the event!" he declared at last with perfect truth.

"Oh, well, I can't stick a chap who's always singing out 'I told you so!'" retorted Hythe, begging the question with the most flagrant unfairness.

Farquhar would have been very surprised indeed if you'd have told him so, but the look he threw at the speaker was almost one of gratitude.

CHAPTER VI

THE BROTHERHOOD

If Gegechkory had not made his voice heard in the land during the last week, it was because he had been thinking. There was a very real personal regret mixed in with his sympathy for the Doctor, for with the latter's departure, his best friend in England, and indeed, almost in the whole world, was going away.

He belonged to one of the oldest families in Poland, and when his father was sent to prison, and his estates confiscated, Gegechkory was sent to England, as much to get him out of the way as anything else. The uncle who had taken charge of him, and who had chosen the part of discretion rather than valour in political affairs, was in no mind to have his position with the Government jeopardised by any quixotic pranks on the part of this young nephew of his. Moreover, the boy's passionate affection for his father rendered it more than probable that if left to himself, he would try to organise some mad scheme of rescue. Consequently he was packed off to St. Osyth's with all speed. But if his board and education

were paid for there, it was as much as you could say. His very clothes were grudged him. His ancestors had lived the life of princes on their estates, but this scion of their race went about with the cuffs of his sleeves a couple of inches up his arm, and his trousers so tight that he seemed to have been poured into them. As for pocket money, many a fag would have been rich beside him. Also he had to spend his holidays at school, except on the rare occasions when Giffard, or some other of his chums, invited him home.

Now, the old Doctor, being a wealthy as well as a kindly soul, had had many opportunities of being good to the lonely boy, which he had used generously. Gegechkory had a fierce pride of his own, which made it almost as much as one's life was worth to offer him a favour. Still, the Doctor had managed things tactfully, and in consequence had lightened Gegechkory's three years' sojourn in England in many ways. Once he had taken him to Switzerland as his guest, and several times during the holidays he had motored him up to town for a couple of days.

Thus, Gegechkory had much to be really grateful to the Doctor for, and the poverty of his home life made the benefits seem even greater than they were. In consequence, at the first hint of the Doctor's being sent away,

Gegechkory's soul had burnt within him with indignation. During the time when he lay between life and death, it is doubtful if anyone in all the world was more sincerely anxious. And now that the resignation was an accomplished fact, he hated the man whom he believed had tried to oust the Doctor from his post, and who in any case was profiting by his removal, with a fervour compared to which Farquhar's efforts in that direction were mere child-play.

As has already been observed, he had been doing some hard thinking lately. He had cordially approved of the Captain's attempt to prevent the usurper's coming, by giving the trustees a plain statement of facts, of which they were presumably unaware. But the trustees, having proved themselves like almost all other people in authority, except the Doctor, with whom Gegechkory had come in contact during the course of his short life, to be "tyr-r-ants," it behoved him to settle accounts with the minion on his own. The ease with which the trustees had seemed to set the Captain aside, had slightly shaken his faith in that gentleman's power, so, like the farmer in the fable, he decided that if you want a thing done well, you must run the business yourself. It was with this idea in his mind that he started the Brotherhood.

The beautiful simplicity of its organisation

was in itself a triumph. Indeed its inauguration, including the nomination of its president, and the enrolling of its first member, was accomplished within the space of five minutes. Not that Gegechkory, with all his astuteness, had actually planned so neat a campaign as this. But if its success in the first instance was so much due to circumstances as anything else, the way in which the founder of the institution turned these circumstances to his own, or rather the Brotherhood's advantage, showed something not unlike genius.

Casting about in his mind for a likely person in whom to confide the scheme, Gegechkory fixed at last upon Giffard. For one thing, he was a personal friend, and so would be naturally disposed to look favourably upon the plan from the start, and for another, he was so popular in the school that his alliance would be of real value. Then, too, though he ran straight enough in the main, there was a gay and lawless streak in his nature, which made it only too likely that the project would appeal to him on its own merits. Also—although probably only Gegechkory would have reasoned in quite this way—he was not so overburdened with brains as to make it an impossible task, to override any objections he was likely to raise.

But objections were the last things in Giffard's mind, when the scheme was explained to him. As Gegechkory expounded the idea, it seemed to hold out prospects of the most sporting kind. He had meant to do his little lot towards downing this undesirable Mr. FitzHerbert in any case, and that he should be asked to bind himself with a company of cheerful and lively spirits, bent on the same agreeable pastime, struck him as very sociable and pleasant.

"All right, old man. You can count me in," he agreed. "But who are you going to have for the other chaps. Berkeley would join like a shot, I know, if I asked him."

Gegechkory nodded, rather absently, and when he spoke it showed that he hadn't been thinking about Berkeley at all. "I should like much to have Hythe!" he said unexpectedly.

Giffard stared at him, "What, old Scissors?" he exclaimed, his jaw seeming to drop quite a couple of inches at the shock. "What on earth do you want *him* for?"

"Because if he is not with us, he will be against us. Is it not so?" said Gegechkory, arriving at the Biblical truism independently.

"Well, who cares if he is?" said Giffard still staring. "Scissors! what next!"

Gegechkory took the last remark literally. "The next," he said, "is to appoint a

president. Have you a good president in the eye of your mind?"

As long as Gegechkory kept to classical English he was fairly safe. It was when he took to making shots at the vernacular that he went under. Still, in the present instance, Giffard understood him well enough.

"Well, you'd do as well as anybody, Pony," he declared with unconscious patronage.

"The affair then is settled!" answered Gegechkory with engaging simplicity. "I will be your president with much pleasure. I am in the knowledge of these matters—I have had reason to be!" There came a sudden tempest of feeling into his dark eyes, and he struck the top button of his waistcoat, with one of the foreign gestures that St. Osyth's had almost chaffed him out of.

"Well, keep your hair on, old man!" advised Giffard, who liked Gegechkory best in his less strenuous moods.

Gegechkory obeyed, that is to say he ceased to make a banner of his arm, and became as far as regarded his outward demeanour, at least, fairly normal. But there was a new eager look on his face that had not been there five minutes before. It was as though the real Gegechkory—the young Polish count who had crowded more experiences into his seventeen years than Giffard, if he followed

the career of a country gentleman, which providence in its forbears had marked out for him, would probably meet with in the whole course of his existence—had leapt out at him across the bridge of his uneventful three years of school life. This mimic brotherhood, whose members at best could only be unemotional little English school-boys began to affect him with a strange excitement, while the gentleman in whose interests the whole thing was being got up—the unfortunate Mr. FitzHerbert—became insuperably connected in his own mind with the tyr-r-ants who had wrought so much harm to him and his.

"It is for the president alone to tumble down to how many members are in the Brotherhood, and who they are," he gave out.

Giffard looked disappointed. Evidently a Brotherhood was not the social festivity he had fondly imagined it. "Won't that be rather poor fun?" he objected.

"It is for safety," Gegechkory declared earnestly. "If you do not know who the members are, when the new Doctor demands of you who is the culprit, you can tell him it is the cat!"

"I can see myself!" Giffard murmured.

"We will have a meeting to-morrow night," Gegechkory went on eagerly, "in my study.

It will be in the dark, and only the president must speechify, as the sound of your voices might betray you to each other."

"Sounds lively for us !" was Giffard's comment.

"The lively part for you will be afterwards!" was Gegechkory's cryptic utterance in response to this.

"Well, have it your own way," said Giffard, who was due at footer, and to whom Gegechkory's precious Brotherhood was the merest interlude in a busy life.

The recommendation really seemed unnecessary; it is difficult to see how the president of any society could have it more his own way than Gegechkory was having it now. Indeed, from the moment when Giffard had declared his conviction that he would do as well as another for the office of president, and Gegechkory, not being burdened with false modesty, had agreed with him, he had begun to map out rules, methods of procedure, almost as autocratically as if he had been a "tyr-r-ant" himself. So that the next member of St. Osyth's whom he approached on the subject might well have been excused for believing the Brotherhood to be an accomplished fact. And if the member after him did not realise that he was honoured in being called upon to join so august and influential a body, the

fault certainly did not lie with Gegechkory's method of conveying the information.

Hythe was the next member. Gegechkory presented himself in the latter's study just as he was beginning evening prep. Though he greeted him civilly enough, Hythe could not help rather wondering what he wanted. He did not get many visitors, and his acquaintance with Gegechkory was too slight to make it likely that he had come for the pleasure of his society alone.

"You have a beautiful room," was Gegechkory's way of beginning the conversation. He himself had the regulation study, and a very good study too, than which no boy need have desired anything better. But Hythe's apartment, with its bright carpet, and its bureau and well-stocked bookshelves, to say nothing of the pictures on its walls, and its two easy chairs, was, as Gegechkory comparing the two in his own mind correctly observed, "quite otherwise than this."

"My governor fixed it up," answered Hythe indifferently. "Try this chair." As he spoke he pushed forward a lounge-like arrangement of so accommodating a shape that Gegechkory as he sank down seemed rather to line than to fill it.

It was on ordinary school topics that they talked at first; then on footer, at which Gegechkory curiously enough was first-class;

of the prospect of next term's cricket, and the fanciful dream that after the match the cup might affect a change of address; of how "It" of Yaeger's had that day in class translated "Cave Canem" into "Beware of the Cane." Then some Polish name brought out the fact that Hythe had just got a rather rare Russian stamp, and he fished out a stamp album, an examination of whose contents involuntarily widened Gegechkory's eyes.

"That collection, is it not very full of the purse?" he inquired lucidly.

"I suppose so," answered Hythe, who, like the rest of St. Osyth's, was accustomed to Gegechkory's flights of speech, and in the main able to translate them. "I've been collecting ever since I was a kid, you see, and my governor's as hot on it now as I am. If there's anything good going about, I can generally reckon on his having a whack at it for me."

Gegechkory moved rather restlessly. Hythe's way of talking of fathers, as though it was their mission to make life a soft thing for their offspring, made him gulp. Before the grim walls of Schlusselfburg had closed round him, his father had been like that, too—although Gegechkory's own taste had not happened to lie in anything so mild as stamps.

Lying now on the big lounge, with his eyes half closed and his white hands above his

head, Hythe's visitor began to talk in quite a fascinating way. His theme was Poland, and the horrors and hair-breadth escapes and wild heroic deeds that have been her portion since the Partition. And the wonder of it was that these enchanting stories, which rivalled in interest any adventure book which Hythe had ever read, had actually happened to Gegechkory's own family. Among other things he told how a company of Cossacks, riding past a Polish crowd, had imagined they heard a curse hurled at them; now, wheeling round, they threatened to shoot into the mass which included women and children, unless the guilty person gave himself up. And how a youth of fifteen, though wholly innocent in the matter, stepped out, and was shot dead with his head held high, and a laugh of defiance on his lips.

"He was my cousin," said Gegechkory.

"Well, he was a ripper, anyway!" returned Hythe.

"If he had not done it another would," declared Gegechkory proudly. "It was the spirit of being corporate, that and hating the tyr-r-ants that dogged him on. You can understand that spirit, you who signed that paper in order that you might be physicked with the rest!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Hythe, turning red and uncomfortable.

"It is not bosh," retorted Gegechkory. "It is a spirit which should be encouraged. And it is for that, that an encouraging society has been started here."

"Eh?" said Hythe.

"You do not understand?" inquired Gegechkory surprised. "Now, with my countrymen, a word, a look, it is enough. How do you Engleesh then manage without imaginations?"

"Oh, we get along," the representative of the race assured him in his temperate way.

"It is a society in which I have much interest," continued Gegechkory, getting to business again. "We want you to join us, I have come express to ask you."

Perhaps Hythe suffered from the national complaint. At any rate, the society presented itself to him as a sort of cross between a Mutual Improvement and a Browning Society. It was not much in his line certainly, but St. Osyth's did not over-burden him with invitations, and it was really rather decent of Gegechkory to take all this trouble. So for all these reasons combined, and because it really would not hurt him to put in half an hour or so at the entertainment, he said good-naturedly:

"Well, I don't mind. What sort of a show is it, though, exactly?"

"It is a Brotherhood," answered Gegech-

kory. "We have many such in my country."

"What are they for?" asked Hythe with a show of polite interest.

"Some of them think things," said Gegechkory, "and some of them," this with an air of artless pride, "do things."

Hythe tried to look impressed, but must have failed, for his visitor shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "The explain is deeficult," he said. "The things that are played out here, seem to you the world. You know nothing of the events that are coming off in my country."

"Well, it's just as bad for your country," Hythe told him without moving a muscle. "It knows nothing of the things that are being played on here!"

Gegechkory looked at him rather sharp'y, although all he said was:

"Ah, well, you have plighted your promise to become a member of the Brotherhood. You will be better informed after you have pervaded the meetings."

"Meetings!" echoed Hythe. "That's rather a large order, isn't it? I'm sweating like a nigger for this beastly exam. just now, you know. Still, I don't mind showing up at the next one. When is to be?"

The exam. he referred to was always held at the departure of the Captain of the school.

Because of that three months' trip to India which Farquhar had to put in before going to Sandhurst, it was this year being held a term in advance. It was only open to members of the Sixth, the one whose name came out top of the list being declared captain of the school. There were various pleasant perquisites attached to it, too, such as quite a respectable scholarship, and enough gilt-edged, leather-backed classical literature to make one's head ache to look at, much less to peruse. But though everyone was grumbling at having the extra preparation put on them just now, and though they knew that Farquhar's days were numbered, yet in the happy-go-lucky, sufficient-for-the-day spirit, which is the blessed heritage of youth, no one of them all had as yet grasped the fact how deeply its results might effect the school.

"To-morrow, in my study, at ten o'clock," said Gegechkory, answering Hythe now with perfect correctness, and all in a breath.

"You mean nine, don't you?" asked Hythe.

Gegechkory gazed steadily into his eyes; he couldn't for the life of him make out whether Hythe meant the remark in innocence or sarcasm. Still, as the result of his scrutiny he found that he did mean nine.

He stored the little incident in his mind

for future correction, though. In the days to come, when Hythe had come under the curb of the Brotherhood, he would perhaps think twice before bearding its president with such paltry things as school-rules.

"Nine, of course," he said, now, however, capitulating gracefully. "You will not fail to come?"

"You're mighty pressing, Pony, all of a sudden," said Hythe, with something so like suspicion in his tones that Gegechkory judged that the time for closing the interview had arrived.

To understand Gegechkory's game, the incurably romantic side of his nature must be kept well in view. He wanted Hythe in with them, for the precise reason he had given Giffard, namely, that he preferred to have him for a friend than an enemy. The way that Hythe had made him climb down just now, in that little matter of the change of hour, for instance, had only strengthened the feeling. But the subtlety which made him recognise Hythe as a power in the land, long before the first dawning gleam of such a notion occurred to St. Osyth's, made him realise, too, that he would never voluntarily consent to join the Brotherhood if its real character was known to him. The only thing to do, or so it seemed to Gegechkory, was to inveigle him into joining, by what practically amounted to

false pretences, and leave him to find out what he had let himself in for, when it was too late to draw back. In Gegechkory's own country no one having once joined a Brotherhood ever did draw back. Perhaps a healthy respect for cold steel, or a distaste for the secret, invidious bullet, may have had something to do with this, but the result was the same.

Thus it was, that having got Hythe's word, Gegechkory considered the matter settled. But Bunge, if he had only known, might have found a promising subject for the next debate in the question whether too much imagination is not almost as great a disadvantage to its possessor, as too little.

That Hythe had fallen into the trap so easily may be partly explained by the fact that the Gegechkory who had just visited him was practically a changed being. If you had told him that Gegechkory, the gentle, almost shy prefect, he had hitherto known, would have dared to approach him, another prefect, with any idea of persuading him to go shares in such a crooked business, he would have summed you up in his own mind, in a word distinctly uncomplimentary to your intelligence. And if you had added further that a Society which had so condescendingly honoured him with an invitation to join its ranks had, at the moment of asking,

consisted merely of a president, who had really nominated himself, and one other member, the colossal impudence of the thing would have taken his breath away.

However, he was to discover these important details later.

CHAPTER VII

A CHECK TO THE BROTHERHOOD

Hythe, up to his eyes as he was in exam. work, couldn't help feeling his appointment with Gegechkory an unmitigated nuisance, when nine o'clock came round the next evening. But if, on the whole, he expected to be bored, he also expected to get a little mild amusement out of the vagaries of an "encouraging" Society. But though amusement is hardly the right word in which to describe the emotions he experienced, he certainly was not bored.

He was taking Lower School Prep., and a slight difference of opinion he had had with Sandford as to the proper time in which the ancient game of noughts and crosses should be played, made him five or six minutes late. Yet in spite of this, and to his no small surprise, he found Gegechkory outside his study door, evidently waiting for him. He looked as important as the Grand Mogul, and seemed to speak in capital letters all the time. Moreover, he put his fingers on his lips with a gesture that no one could have mistaken for a signal for silence, but which

Hythe had hitherto only seen practised on the stage.

"Pass in, Brother!" he said in a hushed whisper. "The others are already accumulated. Inside, all is dark. But I myself will guide you to a chair."

"Dark? What's that for?" asked Hythe.

"It is so decree! Go in and take your place!" ordered Gegechkory. His very manner was changing. There was a superb arrogance about it now, which might have made some people laugh, if it had not affected them the other way.

Hythe was one of the people whom it affected the other way. "I don't know that I will, thanks," he replied. "You forgot to mention that it was a Maskelyne and Cook's entertainment when you invited me, you know."

Gegechkory came off the stilts at once. "I beg you to come in," he said courteously. "Besides, you have promised. As for the darkness, it is better, believe me. And pardon that I also request that no one speaks but me, the president."

"Well, some people might call that a one man show," returned Hythe gravely. "But as I haven't come to jaw myself, I don't mind."

"Give me your hand," said Gegechkory, "and I will lead you to the appointed place."

Hythe did as he was requested, though not with the best grace. "If you're up to any tricks look out, Pony, that's all," he warned.

In the knightly days of yore, in which it sometimes seemed that Gegechkory must have been born, a young knight-errant, on meeting with an adventure of this kind, would have taken a firm grip of his sword hilt. Hythe was without these aids to defence, but if on entering the darkened room any misguided person had come at him, the probabilities are that they would have found his fist inconveniently ready. He had also taken the precaution before entering to run his eye along the top of the door, in search of a possible booby-trap. Also he sat down with thistle down lightness on the seat to which Gegechkory directed him—chairs with collapsible bottoms being not unknown offerings to St. Osyth's unwary visitors. That his mind should have run on such masterpieces of humour is a sufficiently good indication of the value he set on Gegechkory's wonderful Society.

It was a good thing that Gegechkory hadn't much furniture in his study, or the crew he had invited here to-night would never have got in. It was too dark to see clearly, but after he had got used to his bearings a little, Hythe distinguished faint and shadowy forms wherever he looked. They were crowded

together on the bed, on the broad window-seat, on the top of the chest of drawers. Detachments, too, seemed to be sitting on the floor, to judge by the wordless howls of protest that altered his progress.

The blind was down, but chunks of moonlight coming in through a big hole in the middle wove spectral shadows on the floor. That, and the silence, in which nothing was to be heard but the hard breathing of the occupants of the room, was in itself uncanny. Even Hythe, sitting in the one and only comfortable chair, staring at Gegechkory as he stood at a table, his back to the window and his figure silhouetted against the blind, had to shake himself to get rid of the weird feeling that the whole thing somehow engendered.

Gegechkory seemed to like the prolonged hush, however. At anyrate he kept it up as long as he could. But it got too much for the Brotherhood's nerves at last, as an expressive cough from one corner of the room, and the stamping of more than one pair of feet in another, testified. Also a loud "Me-a-w" and the whistling of a popular waltz tune went to prove that the audience, although deprived of words, were not left without resources. At any rate their united eloquence at length prevailed, and Gegechkory opened his mouth to emit the following words of wisdom :

"Members of the Brotherhood, I welcome you. In making the attendance to-night, you have taken the pledge to a solemn and sacred cause. The cause is to promote the corporate spirit. The corporate spirit is the Brotherhood. Henceforward you must put the Brotherhood before yourselves. As members of the Brotherhood you are great matters. As yourself you are nothing."

Hythe had heard all this the night before and its second repetition was duller than he had expected. But his interest was soon to be quickened.

"It is now no longer what you like but what the Brotherhood likes," went on the orator. "Thus, if the Brotherhood wishes a thing done and it is you are made the instruments of doing it, you will obey. It is as though you were obeying yourself. You are the Brotherhood. It is to this vow of altogether obedience that you have pledged yourself."

At this statement Hythe opened his lips. He was going to say, "Hold on!" or its equivalent, but remembering Gegechkory's injunction to silence he shut them again. But it was at this point that he realised that he was not going to be bored.

"Your obedience will be given willing, of course," the president continued. "But even if it is not given willing, it must still be

given. There are of us a many against one, and the punishment of a traitor would be"—there was a pause, and Gegechkory's voice sounded cruel, although he only said—"for him, not nice." It might have reminded an older audience of those days not so very far back, after all, when a Polish landholder, of Gegechkory's class, would have had a rebellious serf whipped, as a matter of course.

As heard in the silent room, with the moonlight coming in in patches, the threat wasn't an agreeable thing to listen to. Someone caught his breath sharply. Hythe turned his head in the direction of the sound, but in the dim light could distinguish nothing.

Having made his point, Gegechkory proceeded to more practical matters. "A Brotherhood is not alone for corporateness," he explained. "That is only a little half of what it has to do. It has to keep open the wounds that are made by the oppressor and to pickle the rods for the tyr-r-ants. At this moment that I speak to you, there is a arch-tyr-r-ant on his way. His name is Fitz-Herbert. There are many ways in which the Brotherhood could ruffle the composure of him. Now I have observe sometime that when you are asked direct, 'Have you done such and such a thing?' you answer, 'Yes, I have done it.' And when I say, 'But why?' you answer, 'What is a chap to do?'

He put me on to the honour.' But in a Brotherhood there is not this sort of honour. for to confess would be to betray the Brotherhood."

Hythe had half risen to his feet. But he sat down again at this. To get the full flavour of Gegechkory's remarks a little quiet reflection was necessary.

"But this arch tyr-r-ant, he is not the one and only!" said Gegechkory, getting into swing; "there are others——"

"Including prefects?" asked Hythe, really heaving himself to his feet this time.

Gegechkory seemed to splutter with rage at the interruption. When his indignation allowed him utterance, his words seemed to let themselves off on his refractory subject like so many squibs.

"It is I who am speaking!" he remonstrated.

"That's just it," Hythe explained unkindly.

"But if the members do continue to hear your voice they will know in another minute who you are," cried Gegechkory, in passionate protest.

"They'll know something else about me in another minute or too, if this moonshine goes on," Hythe assured him meaningly. He didn't allude to the atmospheric conditions, though these may have helped him to the word.

"But in a Brotherhood, it is the part of the president to do the speechifying, I tell you," Gegechkory repeated, almost crying with rage.

"Well, you've had quite a good innings, Pony," he was told. "So dry up and give someone else a chance. I'm in now. And I shan't be interrupted by the others, it seems, thanks to those little arrangements of yours."

There was a moment of stress. What was the illustrious president going to do?

What he did do they none of them quite knew. But for a second or two the two figures seemed to lurch together.

"Ah, would you?" the voice was Hythe's. It didn't sound ruffled, rather absent-minded indeed, as though he was occupied with his hands. "Mustn't do that, Pony. Not sporting, you know. Now sit here comfortably till I've done. But don't do that again, because I'll have to hurt you worse next time."

Most of the audience were on their feet. Something would certainly have happened but for the fact that Gegechkory seemed to acquiesce in the arrangement. At any rate, his figure sank down into what was presumably a sitting-posture, while Hythe, standing in the place he had vacated, began to speak his mind.

"Now, you chaps," he said, "I don't mean

to be hard on you. I couldn't be, as a matter of fact, because I'm in the same boat myself. But I thought Ge-ge here was running a sort of mothers' meeting, and I showed up tonight just to oblige him. You may have done the same. But in case you didn't, I don't want to know. That's why I don't turn on the light."

"You could not if you would." This from Gegechkory. "I have cut off the electric wire."

"Then we shall know who to send the bill in to!" said Hythe. "But I've got a pocket electric lamp here," he continued cheerfully. "Always carry it. Comes in handy in the corridors at night. Did you speak, Pony?"

If expletives, loud and long and deep, come under the term, then certainly Pony was speaking. But from the way he suddenly quieted down it rather seemed as though Hythe had been busy with his hands again.

"Now that Pony has finished bargeeing, we can get to business," Hythe resumed after this little interruption. "I suppose you fellows don't need to be told that this thing's got to stop. If it went on it would rot the school. It's low. It's filthy. It's crawling. And it's only because Pony's a foreigner that he's tried to put you on to such a mongrel idea."

"In my country," observed Gegechkory, and it sounded as though the words came through clenched teeth, "we fight a duel with pistols for less than that."

"And in my country, Pony, we have to make shift with our fists," Hythe instructed him equally. "So come down to the gymnasium, any day you like, and I'll take you on with the gloves with the greatest pleasure in life. But it's my show now, not yours, so shut up. I've nearly done."

Leaving Gegechkory to digest the information he turned to the others again. "It's the cheek of the thing that fetches me," he told them, beginning to laugh. "In this precious Brotherhood we've heard so much about, no one's to utter a syllable bar the president. No one's to know which chaps are in it—bar the president. No one's to have a look, in fact—bar the president. And it's the president whose, to give orders, and to put the dirty work on to whoever he likes, and to see that it's made 'not nice' for the Brother who just won't. Well, I don't know what you chaps think, but it seems to me that old Pony's fixed up rather a topping time for himself!"

"I will give up that the members do not speak or know each other," conceded Gegechkory in a great hurry.

"You'll have to give up more than that,

Ge-ge. You'll have to give up the whole show," Hythe told him seriously. "And that's my last word."

"But whatever you say, you are still a member of the Brotherhood," declared Gegechkory, managing to infuse a curious sinister quality into the words. "You have promised."

"Rot!" said Hythe.

"Then you are a traitor! And what I have engaged for the other traitors, shall be done to you!" Gegechkory threatened.

"You tried to do something of the sort to me just now, didn't you? when I thought I felt a fly tickling," asked Hythe, and laughed.

"But your honour? You have, then, not of it?" enquired Gegechkory.

"Woa, Pony!" observed the gentleman supposed to be deficient in that quality, with a note of warning in his voice.

"In my country where a gentleman makes a bargain, he does keep it," sneered Gegechkory.

"And in my country, Ge-ge, when a gentleman's been cheated into making a bargain, he's not such an idiot as to do anything of the kind," Hythe informed him. "And he isn't even bound to fight the cheat—like I've offered to fight you," he added casually.

You couldn't see Gegechkory go white with

rage because it was dark. But you could almost hear him.

"For that you shall——" he cried wickedly, and then paused.

"Now, don't say die, Pony—with the cricket season coming on," laughed his would-be victim.

Gegechkory apparently tried to say something which the depths of his feelings prevented him from getting out.

"Never mind, old chap, we'll take it for granted," Hythe assured him soothingly. "And now clear out, the rest of you. It's close on ten. 'Fraid you'll have to go to bed in the dark to-night, Ge-ge—that electric wire, you know—unless you'd like to borrow my lamp."

All at once, and so suddenly as to give quite a shock, Gegechkory spoke in his normal voice.

"You have spy into our affairs," he said slowly. "You have eavesdrop yourself into our secrets. You have threatened us—well, we have threatened you, so we are quits all the two of us. But the new Doctor? The Captain? Shall you sneak on us to them?"

"You're in form to-night, Ge-ge!" observed Hythe admiringly. "I haven't 'spy' and I haven't 'eavesdrop,' and your idiotic secrets are the last things on earth I want to know. But since I've managed to overhear

them, I'm not going to 'sneak,' as you call it, to the Doctor or anybody else."

"And what guarantee have we for that, I ask you?" demurred Gegechkory.

"Well, you've my word," Hythe reminded him.

"The word of a traitor," sneered Gegechkory.

"Well, it'll have to be good enough for you, Pony," said Hythe philosophically. "But though I'm not going to report you, I shouldn't advise you to go on with the thing after what I've said. And now cut, you chaps. It's striking ten!"

Whatever pressure he had been putting on Gegechkory was evidently relaxed. For the next minute with a bound that was almost like that of some forest creature, Gegechkory had broken away from him, and was with the rest.

"At him, Brothers!" he cried. "Hit him! Do not let him leave this place without getting the what for!"

There was a simultaneous forward movement in the darkness. For a minute it almost seemed as though an ugly rush was to be made.

"They'd better!" Hythe warned him, and there was a growl in his voice, which stopped whatever was in progress. "I'll keep my promise about not nipping you fellows, as long

as you go quietly. But I've my hand on the switch of this lamp. And the first chap who comes within a foot of me'll get it turned on. And if there aren't some pleasant little surprises in store for him to-morrow, I don't know myself. And now, march!"

The members of the Brotherhood passed out into the darkness. They sounded in a hurry to get away. Hythe waited until the last of them had got through the doorway, and then turned to Gegechkory.

"You're sure you won't borrow the lamp, Pony? No? Ta-ta, then, and pleasant dreams."

If one had understood Gegechkory's own language, it would probably have been quite a liberal education to hear his candid opinion of Hythe that night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW DOCTOR

The next Sunday evening there was a stranger in the Doctor's place in chapel. And he preached a rather remarkable sermon.

The feeling that comes over one at Sunday night chapel is so intimate and so sacred and so not to be talked about, that we are not going into the subject at any length here. Such things, belonging as they do to the most private part of a schoolboy's life, and to what for want of a better word one may call his soul, are his own private possessions, into which no decent person would care to pry. In this one quiet hour, with the past week, with its failures and its triumphs well behind and indeed almost forgotten, and the coming week, in spite of black Monday ahead, certain to be filled to overflowing with the thousand and one pleasures which careless youth is heir to, nothing can happen. For this briefest of spaces one is forced to listen, or at least to think. Looking back, in after life, cannot one trace certain immature resolves that were made, certain childish aspirations that were formulated, certain small sacrifices that were

determined upon, in the twilight Sunday interval?

The stranger had the pleasantest voice. It was low and even, yet it seemed to fill the chapel. Not one word escaped anyone. And while he spoke it was as though he was addressing everybody there, personally. He was in the pulpit, of course, but if he had not been, I don't think that anyone would have realised that he was preaching a sermon at all. It was as though a friend were talking to them, of things which his friendship gave him a right to utter.

I don't remember the text—perhaps there wasn't one. But the subject the sermon dealt with was pride. And what the stranger had to say about it was listened to for several reasons. One was that to a congregation which had been brought up to rank pride among the deadly sins, in theory if not in practice, it came as something of a shock to find that the preacher had quite different views: and the other had to do with the magic of a personality which could have held an audience, even though the topic chosen for discussion had been nothing more exciting than a tin kettle.

To listen to him it seemed that the preacher was the proudest man in the world. He said that pride in oneself was a great, good thing to possess. The more pride a boy had,

the better boy he was likely to be. Really, for St. Osyth's, one side of which at least was conspicuously blessed with the quality, it was all very soothing.

But as he went on there did not seem room for so much elation, after all. What had sounded such an easy doctrine seemed now to be the reverse. This fine pride in oneself would prevent one, it seemed, from going astray. Because one had it, it would keep one from doing anything low, or mean, or cowardly.

It would make one run a straight course too, without stopping to think about the bystanders. Other people's good opinion was a pleasant thing to possess: but it was an ignoble thing to make for. The thing to do was to make sure that one could respect oneself. A boy who acted so that he could respect himself and then cared if other people looked down on him, deserved to be looked down on. That was to have a poor spirit. That was to have the spirit of the "hireling who looketh for reward."

There was a sort of pride that went by the name of pride of place, said the preacher. That was a foolish pride. How could anyone be proud of name or wealth, or power that had been gained for him by other people? The boy who made the best use of the talents committed to his charge, even though

he never did anything brilliant, was as much to be admired as the boy who won matches or scholarships. (It was observed that the preacher put the two victories in their right order of importance.) A poor crossing sweeper, who had done what he could, and made a good fight against disadvantages, had as great a right to pride as a king's son.

No one talked about the sermon, of course. Boys never do. But it was the sort of discourse which was calculated to give them some ideas, nevertheless. Thus, for instance, when Berkeley, on coming out of chapel, pushed against Malet in trying to get out first, as he had a perfect right to do, being a Classic, Malet turned on him with a "Who've shoving?" in a voice so independent that it mightn't have belonged to a Modern at all. Also "It," when told by Ayscough to go and relight Ogle's fire, answered "Light it yourself!" One couldn't say that these things were the direct result of the sermon, of course. Still, they had never happened before in the memory of man.

When it became known that the preacher was the new Doctor, the news was received with incredulity. St. Osyth's was of a conservative turn of mind, and had the same objection to changing its preconceived notions as the rest of the world. And having made up its mind that the new Doctor was a person

to be utterly condemned, it was upsetting to find that, for a short half hour at least, their feelings towards him had been distinctly friendly.

But the most surprising thing was, that once the Doctor's identity had been settled beyond any possibility of doubt, nobody seemed to agree on the subject. Everyone appeared to have conceived a totally different idea of him. I remember myself long after I had left St. Osyth's, hearing someone ask who was "the man with the very blue eyes." Now I had been closely connected with the Doctor for many years. I had been invited to breakfast with him and to another less agreeable and more painful function, and at a later period than that of which I am writing had, as a senior, worked with him in the closest intimacy that can exist between master and pupil. Yet I had never noticed that his eyes were blue, or indeed, given their colour the smallest thought. Perhaps they were the sort of colour that Homer meant when he called the sea "wine-coloured." One could almost say, too, that his personality was of this no colour, every-colour order.

In the senior common-room, when talking him over, the diversity of opinion was very great.

"You'll have to drop that little idea of

yours, about his being cheap stuff, won't you!" said Nugent to Farquhar. "Cambridge doesn't seem to turn out such a shoddy type after all."

"He looks a smug, anyway," returned Farquhar, and disparaging though the words were, they were tantamount to an admission that he *had* dropped the idea.

"Well, it's the first time that I ever heard of a smug being six foot two in his stockings, if he's an inch, and as tough as whip-cord," Curwen was heard to remark.

"It isn't his build I mean, you silly goat," retorted Farquhar. "It's that plaster-saint look he has, and that voice of his like syrup. Ugh, it made me sick!"

"Well, a pin-head like that won't want to go queering your pitch, old man," said Giffard consolingly.

"You never can tell with those quiet chaps, though," objected a Job's comforter.

"Quiet chaps?" the speaker was Gegeckory, and he repeated the word with every appearance of lively amazement. "Why, if I ever see a first-class tyr-r-ant in my life, that is him."

"You aren't holding forth to-night, Scissors? How's that?" asked Nugent.

"I've been thinking," answered Hythe, in that disconcerting way he had of seeming to take chaff seriously.

"Great Scot! you ought to be put in a museum," exclaimed the other. "But aren't we to get the benefit of these flights of fancy?"

"I don't mind," returned Hythe tranquilly. "It was finding him such a decent sort that set me wondering if he really did try and do the Doctor in the eye."

"But Farquhar proved that he did," interposed Ogle in that sucking-up way he had. "And Farquhar's a sight more likely to be right than you are. What's the good of going into all that again?"

Malet had offered no contribution to the discussion. But on Spratt negligently proceeding to wipe his pen on the corner of his jacket he caught hold of that instrument and pitched it violently into the middle of the room.

"You'll just pick that up," said Spratt in indignant surprise.

Malet's laugh showed that Phillpott's "Don't, old chap," was quite unnecessary. And on Curwen's unexpectedly edging towards the pair, Spratt decided that it was not a propitious moment in which to enforce obedience to his mandate. Then, sulkily picking up the cause of contention himself, the fact that the nib was broken, and that he hadn't another on him, helped him to the decision that the Moderns must be taught their places.

"Well, you chaps can say what you like about plaster saints and pin-heads," observed Curwen in his character of a Greek chorus, "but if I was glad before that I hadn't signed that letter, I'm jolly glad now!"

In the junior common-room much the same sort of thing was going on.

"What do you think of him?" said Mothersole to Ayscough rather doubtfully. He didn't want to commit himself before getting his superiors' opinion.

Ayscough hesitated. "Well, do you know," he said almost diffidently, if such a word could be used in such a connection, "I didn't look at him much. You see, the beggar spotted from the start that I was sorting those picture postcards I keep in that hollow prayer-book. He's got such beastly eyes—like gimlets."

"Oh, he's all right," declared Giffard minor, meaning the remark in a distinctly uncomplimentary spirit. "It won't take long to knock the stuffing out of a chap who looks as like that stained-glass window Johnny in Hall as he does."

The reference was to the famous St. George window which was the pride of St. Osyth's. Now that Giffard minor pointed it out the likeness was unmistakable. But even here it seemed the juniors were not altogether agreed.

"What rot about stained glass windows

an' that!" retorted Merton. "I think he looks an awful sport—if he wasn't such a cad, of course, I mean," he added hurriedly.

"I wish he wasn't a cad, though, don't you?" said "It" with a fervour that surprised the rest

"I wonder what the Doctor's done with his cane," murmured Sandford dreamily.

"What a chap you are, Sandford!" said Giffard minor, eyeing him with the same disfavour one would have accorded to the skeleton at the feast. "What put you on to that?"

"It was seeing his wrist on the edge of the pulpit, and thinking what a rattling serve he'd have at tennis," Sandford explained artlessly.

The inference, though obvious, was not in the best taste, and somehow ended the discussion.

For a whole week, St. Osyth's continued as before—only more so. But since it takes two to make a quarrel, no one came to actual loggerheads with the new Doctor. Still, he must have been thicker-skinned than his looks gave him credit for, if he had failed to feel the antagonism to him in the air. And it is not too much to say that Farquhar worked harder than he had ever done in his life in fanning the flame. Considering his position in the school, he also went further than one would have believed possible in fanning it

into the direction of the juniors. And for a captain to enter into partnership, or something not unlike it, with the august company of Bleaters, against recognised authority, was something quite new, even in St. Osyth's experience.

Now, as the old Doctor, towards the end of his stay at least, had been little better than a cipher, the machinery of the school ran on, under Farquhar, pretty much the same as before. It could scarcely be said to run on oiled wheels, of course, because Farmer Baker, meeting a party of seniors, truculently declared that one of them had been out shooting on his fields the night before, and threatened to send in a complaint to the Doctor. Then there had been more than one fight in the middle school, which had gone beyond the decent limits of such things, and had made the matron also threaten to complain. Mothersole too, having the illuminating idea of cleaning his bicycle with petrol, had smuggled in two pennyworth in a bottle from the motor-garage in the village. But lighting a candle the better to assist the cleaning process, the result was a conflagration, which narrowly escaped setting the school on fire, and incidentally deprived Mothersole of his eyelashes and, for a quarter of an hour, of his sight. Then—but we should never get on with our story if we were to relate half the

things that happened in that festive week of St. Osyth's history. You see, Farquhar had made it a point of honour with the prefects that nothing was to be reported to the Doctor. They were to settle matters themselves, or let him do so. In the flagrant cases I have mentioned, he certainly did make sharp work for the offenders, but where one was touched up, half a dozen got off scot free. Thus the urbane, courteous gentleman, whose work Farquhar was doing for him, must have found much to interest him in this first survey of his new kingdom.

But the one weak point in the arrangement was that, of course, the masters could not be asked to co-operate in this philanthropic scheme to save the Doctor labour. And it wasn't to be expected that they would be filled with the same zeal to take the whole burden of the school on to their own shoulders as were Farquhar and the rest. So, much to the Captain's disgust, Mr. Yago was unpatriotic enough to report "It" for "gross impertinence." It sounded rather a large order for so small a culprit.

Mr. Yago ought never to have been a schoolmaster. He didn't like boys. He always suspected them of evil intentions. And in a painstaking, fussy, worrying way, he was always trying to convict them of things they hadn't done. Considering that they had

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always more on their hands than they could conveniently answer for, all this was irritating enough. At the same time, the ease with which he could be hoodwinked, earned him everybody's contempt. Often and often the young hopefuls of his house would win themselves out of his clutches by the most barefaced artifice. But their escapes never aroused the smallest gratitude in their minds. It wasn't because "old Yaeger" wanted to let them off, they felt, but because he hadn't the wit to see through them. For boys after all are profound believers in the doctrine of value received, and have a healthy respect for the being who can force them to run straight, even though his methods are painful at the time.

Another thing about Mr. Yago, too, which pointed him out as being a weak master, was his habit of sending boys up to the Doctor instead of dealing with them himself. Strong masters only did this in extreme cases. But as a matter of fact the unfortunate gentleman had mistaken his vocation. He didn't keep order, he hadn't any influence, and according to Ayscough, who ought to have known, he couldn't even teach. Yet just because he was so patently a failure, he was all the more anxious to do his duty. His aggravating suspiciousness, his refusal to take their word, his desire to see them meet with their deserts

at other and stronger hands than his own, was due to a sense of moral obligation as much as anything else. The subject he taught was mathematics, but if fate had been kinder to him he might perhaps have been quite a famous engineer. His study, though this is from hearsay, as he never invited me within the sacred precincts, was as full of ingenious mechanical contrivances, "gim-cracks" old Joseph called them, as an egg is full of meat.

On the morning before "It" was sent up, everything had gone wrong from Mr. Yago's point of view. The prevailing spirit of lawlessness had got to the little boys' heads, causing them to go to the most outrageous lengths. The mathematical lesson had been one series of coughs, cat-calls, whisperings, and promptings. Then Ayscough, who had been calmly feeding his silk-worms on mulberry leaves, when called upon to desist, observed that the poor creatures were on the verge of starvation, and, like the rest of the class, seemed to have the poorest opinion of the inhuman being who could bid him leave them in that condition. His qualms of conscience about obeying caused Mr. Yago to bang with his fist on the desk, thus affording the proud possessor of a kodak an opportunity of getting a snap-shot that the master could have done without. Before he

had time to confiscate the instrument, he had to stop an interesting competition that was going on between Sandford and Mothersole as to which could make the biggest blots with one waft of the pen, thus obligingly giving Giffard minor time to make a substantial meal off nougat, before his very eyes. As a result of all this, and a hundred other pin-pricks, Mr. Yaeger's temper had got rasped to breaking point. It was a pity that he should have let off all the vials of his wrath on the head of the—comparatively—most innocent person in the room.

Now, with anyone like Mr. Yaeger, it was carrying scrupulosity to the verge of foolishness not to use cribs, or at least to refrain from giving a coy glance at the "Answers to Sums" which a too confiding printer had bound with the original Todhunter. But in the previous night's preparation, Todhunter had been set aside by Mr. Yaeger, for a less accommodating author. Thus, nothing was left for his victims but to fall back upon a crib pure and simple. But as there was only one of these aids to knowledge among the lot of them, and as "It" was the sort of person whose wants were attended to last of all, he had had to trust to his own brains for the elucidation of what, under these circumstances, seemed to him fiendishly difficult problems. As a result, his work compared very badly

indeed with that of the more fortunate individuals who had been able to avail themselves of the royal road to learning indicated above.

Mr. Yago pounced upon his mistakes in a way that really terrified the little boy. And no greater proof of his timid nature could be given than that.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Yago. "A child of five in a kindergarten could show up better work. You seem unable to add up the simplest figures. I suppose if I were to ask you how much two and six make, you wouldn't be able to answer."

Unfortunately "It" didn't understand sarcasm. And seeing a chance of setting Mr. Yaeger right in this particular delusion as to his mental deficiencies, he made answer eagerly,

"Please, sir, half a crown."

The class tittered. Who could ever have supposed "It" capable of so colossal a piece of cheek?

Mr. Yago having chosen the smallest subject in the room on whom to resent the manifold indignities which had been put upon him in the last hour, was as much astonished as if a shrimp, or other tame animal, had suddenly shown its teeth. He glared at the offender out of a pair of light gooseberry-coloured eyes, and said in an awful voice :

"Report yourself to the Doctor, sir, after third lesson."

"It" began to protest wildly. But as his agitation made him stutter to the point of inarticulation, and as Mr. Yago's majestic "Silence, sir!" frightened what little wits he had left out of him, it did not do much good.

CHAPTER IX

A LEAD OFF

For the first time in "It's" career, St. Osyth's began to take a new and touching interest in him. He was the first person on whom the new Doctor was to flesh his maiden sword, so to speak. Not that anybody except "It" would have let a little matter of that kind unduly disturb his peace of mind. For a Head-master who could let a whole week go by without referring to the letter which the trustees had gone out of their way to tell them he had received, and who, during the same space of time had allowed the school to disport itself in the blithesome ways we have indicated, was the last person to worry one's soul over. But though they confided these views to "It," he nevertheless began to shake like a jelly, long before the event. How anyone as pigeon-hearted as he was could have hit on the dazzling repartee which had brought him to his present eminence, was a standing mystery.

"Didn't think the kid had it in him," said Spratt.

"I wish it had been anyone else, though,"

said the Captain impatiently. "Why, you could knock him flat with a tea-spoon. Mr. FitzHerbert 'll have it all his own way with a little rotter like that. If only it had been your young brother, Giffard!"

"Yes," agreed Giffard with the most unfilial regret. "The more you whack him, the bouncier he is—he's like indiarubber."

Regarding him in the light of a public character, the Bleaters accompanied "It" in shoals to the Doctor's study. On the way they imparted much information, some of it gathered from personal experience, on an old and painful subject. Ayscough, by dint of badgering Joseph, had satisfied himself on the mooted point of the old Doctor's cane. He *had* left it to his successor, or rather Joseph had found it reposing in its accustomed position, and with a callousness which makes one blush for the human race, had neglected to make use of it for firewood. This seemed a peculiarly appropriate moment in which to bring Joseph's shortcomings into public notice. Then Sandford, who had continued his investigations of the Doctor's wrist, begun in chapel, had had his opinions of its qualifications for getting a good grip of a racquet, a bat—or a cane—confirmed. This conclusion he also communicated. Someone else wanted to know if "It" had packed himself with copy-books and other

light luggage. On being answered in the negative, his sympathetic soul was such that he had to turn aside to wipe away a silent tear. Giffard, as one who should know, obligingly confided the cheering information that after the first cut, the sensation was deadened "rather." On the same friendly tack, Mothersole recommended a preparation of a vaseline-like nature, known as "new skin," for immediate application "afterwards," while someone else had seen a placard in the village announcing that boys or china, he forgot which, could be "mended while you wait." In short they comported themselves like true friends.

"Just one thing," said Ayscough, in "a few last words" spirit, as they neared the door, "if he says it's going to hurt him as much as it will you, you can bet he's the worse kind—he means his hands, you know—or that he'll have to get a new cane!"

When "It," having screwed his courage to the sticking-point, finally applied his skinny little knuckles to the door, it was more like a little bird tapping than anything else. He had to repeat the sound two or three times before he got the dreaded "Come in" he was waiting for. And when he lingeringly accepted the invitation, his face wasn't at all unlike a little bird's either, with its tremulous lip and peaked expression.

The Doctor was writing a letter. But he left off at once to give his attention to this small visitor of his. "Ah, Pearson," he said, and his voice sounded almost sympathetic, "Mr. Yago has reported you for"—he referred here to a note on his desk, and there was a slight twitching of the mobile mouth—"for gross impertinence?" His tone was enquiring.

"It" gulped. He stood for what seemed quite a long time without daring to raise his eyes. But as the doctor didn't say any more, and as he couldn't peruse the Turkey carpet for ever, he had to lift them up at last. And when he had done this, and met those other eyes watching him, a most extraordinary thing happened. A sudden self-confidence came to him, and he said, without stammering at all:

"Please, sir, it wasn't!"

"Let's hear all about it," said the new Doctor.

And the odd thing was that "It" was able to tell him, and without being apologetic, or at least not much.

"I'd done my arithmetic badly, sir. The sums wouldn't add. But Mr. Yago thought I'd been slacking, and he said things about kindergartens an' that. Then he asked me how much did two and six make? I see now it was to make me look an idiot before the

class, sir, but I didn't then. I was pleased to think I did know that, at any rate. And I said 'Half a crown.'"

It didn't sound a very creditable tale, and towards the end some of the speaker's new-found self-confidence began to desert him. He stood first on one foot, and then on the other, and played nervously with the buttons on his waistcoat, till it was pitiful to see him.

But the new Doctor believed him. And at once, too, without any beating about the bush, or any cross-questioning. Just for all the world as if it must be true because the speaker said it was. And if that kind of thing wasn't calculated to make any little boy feel inches taller, I should like to know what was.

"Very well," said the Doctor, "Mr. Yago was mistaken. I will explain matters to him. That will be all right. By-the-way I met a cousin of yours, Pearson, just before I came down here—a cousin you are very proud of, I know."

"Cousin Dick, sir?" asked "It" with shining eyes. Cousin Dick was the person in all the world for whom he had the greatest admiration. It was not affection exactly, because Cousin Dick was rather unapproachable, not easy to talk to, like the Doctor, for instance—but a person, nevertheless, whom

it was a great honour to have belonging to one's family.

It didn't take the Doctor the space between the opening and the shutting of an eye to decide that the Sir Richard Pearson he was referring to, the famous explorer who had made the nearest approach to the North Pole on record, was the "Cousin Dick" of "It's" ecstatic exclamation. He nodded cheerfully.

"He was the guest of the evening at my club, just before I came down," he told the delighted little boy.

"Was he, sir?" asked "It" breathlessly. "And did he tell you how, when the food gave out, they had to start on the dogs, and how when they woke up in the morning, their breath was frozen round them in layers."

"He didn't mention the phenomena that evening," said the Head. "But I read a good deal about his doings in the papers at the time. The world was very full of them, wasn't it? Still, I daresay there are many interesting details you have had at first hand. I haven't time to listen to them now, but if you will come to breakfast with me to-morrow morning, I shall like to hear about them very much."

Really "It" didn't know whether he was standing on his head or his heels when he left the study. That somebody thought him of sufficient importance to talk to him about

the things he liked to talk about, and even wished the conversation to be continued in our next, so to speak, to a grateful accompaniment of breakfast, seemed almost too good to be true. The mere anticipation put him into such unexpected high spirits that when he met the waiting crowd outside, and they surrounded him with the pertinent demand, "Did you get it on the hands, or had you to go down?" he made answer with a fine scorn:

"Not me!"

"I suppose he jawed, though?" asked Ayscough, regarding the little boy's happy face with a puzzled frown.

"Rather! About my Cousin Dick," "It" informed him.

"Who's your Cousin Dick, I should like to know?" demanded Ayscough, beginning to think that the new Doctor's ministrations, whatever form they had taken, had turned his victim's brain.

"Sir Richard Pearson, the one who discovered the North Pole—nearly," answered "It."

"You don't mean to say he's your cousin?" exclaimed Mothersole. "Why, he's no end of a toff, isn't he?"

The remark wasn't flattering, but "It" didn't mind. He didn't mind anything just then. If St. Osyth's hadn't happened to

know that the hero he had just mentioned was his cousin, it was because it had never been sufficiently interested to find out anything about him, much less about his relations. But all that was changed now. And wouldn't the Doctor enjoy it just, when he told him—

"Blest if I don't think the kid is really off his chump!" said Ayscough, eyeing Cousin Dick's youthful relative, who appeared to have gone off into a daydream, quite anxiously. He stirred him up with the toe of his boot, the better to bring him to his senses. "What did he do to you, anyway?" he enquired.

"Asked me to breakfast!" answered "It," not so much with the idea of staggering his audience, as because in the self-complacent frame of mind engendered by his visit, it seemed no more than the proper thing for the Doctor to have done.

"Skittles!" "Well I'm knocked!" "Carry me out!" were some of the ejaculations that followed the announcement.

Now, as it happened, Farquhar and the rest of the seniors were almost as anxious to know the result of "It's" visit as were his fellow Bleaters. The Doctor was already a puzzle to them, that this first occasion on which he had been forced into definite action seemed of immense importance. It

would give them something to go on in the coming campaign. The difficulty was that for the sake of their own dignity it wouldn't have done for them to appear too eager. So Giffard major sacrificed himself for the general good, and routed out his young brother.

That youth's report, when he got it, was surprising.

"Swiped him?" he repeated, in response to the natural inference. "Not much. According to the kid's own showing, he seems to have begged his pardon for having put him to the trouble of coming, said he'd settle old Yaeger for him, and invited him to breakfast."

It will be observed that Giffard minor had added a little cheerful local colour, but he was too obviously too earnest for his elder to think it necessary to fall upon him on the spot.

"You'll catch it hot if you're rotting," he warned. Now, as the speaker had the unfair advantage of being able to continue any little attentions begun in term time, during the holidays, the threat was no idle one.

"It's as true as I'm here," his minor reiterated. "We couldn't swallow it any more than you at first. But the little beggar hasn't got a cut on him, 'cause we've looked!"

"Well, bring him along to the senior

common-room, and we'll hear what he's got to say for himself." ordered his brother, still doubting.

"It" received the summons with consternation. This sudden desire for his society on the part of his superior was getting too much for him. But sufficient self-elation still lingered about him, as the result of his last interview, to enable him to answer Farquhar's questions with some semblance of coherence. The assembled seniors looked very big and imposing to him, although it is possible that their proportions might not have struck anyone of a larger growth in quite the same way.

Farquhar, as being the flower of the flock, so to speak, especially terrified him. And he conducted the catechism with a straightness and severity that did nothing to allay his fears. How different a really great person like Farquhar was from anyone like the Doctor, for instance!

Farquhar planted the little boy stolidly before him, and his grasp on his shoulder was such that the result of the attention was apparent a week afterwards.

"So you've been reported to Mr. Fitz-Herbert," he said judicially. You see, he had to pile on the official manner in order to give some sort of cover to what was really nothing more or less than the satisfaction of



"'You young skunk!'" growled Farquhar, 'going in for howling crams like that at your age!'

his own and the other seniors' curiosity.
"And for what, pray?"

Under this tone and this manner "It's" wits began to give way.

"Gross impertinence!" he answered, helplessly repeating the phrase the Doctor had read out to him.

"Here, none of your lip!" said Farquhar angrily. He actually supposed that the shorn lamb before him was attempting another flight of sarcasm at his expense. The suspicion increased the rigour of his examination, and in consequence reduced "It" to a condition bordering on idiocy.

"Well, what did he give you?" he demanded.

"Nothing," stammered the little boy. "I told him."

"Told him what?" asked Farquhar impatiently.

"That it wasn't true," stuttered his victim.

"You young skunk!" growled Farquhar, "going in for howling crams like that at your age."

"It" by this time was far too dazed to attempt a remark on his own, even though it was to protest his innocence. It evidently needed the Head of St. Osyth's to understand simple little facts like these.

"I suppose he didn't trot out that letter to the trustees, and ask if you were the bold

buccaneer who'd written it?" put in Nugent blandly.

But irony never dawned on "It" until afterwards.

"Oh, no, Nugent," he said seriously.

"And yet one might almost call you one of the younger members of the school," observed Nugent, in what appeared be puzzled reminiscence.

Farquhar put a curb on a natural impulse of his right hand in the speaker's direction, and resumed proceedings. "And after you'd come out with that corker of yours, what happened then?" was his next courteous question.

The very form of the enquiry deprived "It" of the power of consecutive thought. The only thing he could remember was the one blissful fact that was looming so large on his horizon just now. So he answered simply:

"He asked me to breakfast."

"There, what did I tell you?" asked Giffard minor, as one who is justified in himself.

"Well, you'd better show up there!" Farquhar told him.

Regarded as mere words, the speech might be considered as dispassionate advice. Regarded as a tone of voice, it chilled "It" to the marrow of his bones.

"Don't you want me to go, Farquhar?" he enquired weakly.

"Please yourself!" answered Farquhar. The permission was dark with meaning.

"Perhaps you'll have something to say to him when he comes back, Farquhar," insinuated Noad.

"Perhaps!" agreed the Captain, and the vagueness of the threat was the most terrifying thing about it.

"It's jolly rough on the kid, though, you know!" put in Hythe at this point. "Why don't you tell him he's not to go, straight out, if you mean that? Then he can put it on to you."

"Why don't you keep your opinion till it's asked for?" retorted Farquhar in a fury.

"Because I should have to wait such a jolly long time," Hythe informed him equably.

"Here, didn't I tell you to cut, you little worm?" snapped Farquhar to the shivering junior.

He hadn't done anything of the kind, as a matter of fact, but "It," only too thankful for the permission, scuttled off instantly, for once setting the pace to Giffard minor.

But his pleasure was all spoilt. Perhaps, as Farquhar had said, he really was rather a worm. At any rate, he passed a miserable and sleepless night. But his dread of the Captain was such, that the next morning the Doctor perused a most excellent dish of

kidneys and bacon alone, while the various other dishes he had ordered out of consideration for the probable tastes of his youthful guest, went untasted.

In face of "It's" enthusiastic acceptance the night before, his present non-appearance was significant. And the Doctor's face settled down into an expression that didn't suggest his being quite as pleasant a companion for the person responsible for the small boy's non-appearance as the latter had found him the day before.

He didn't send for his coy guest. He waited to pursue his enquiries until he came upon him casually. This was the next afternoon, on his way to the village, where the little boy had been sent by Ogle to get a cricket-bat mended.

The Doctor, it seemed, was on his way to the village, too. He greeted his young pupil urbanely enough, and even, to the latter's horror, evinced a disposition to join company with him. He chatted a little, at first, on topics that "It" would probably have enjoyed well enough on an ordinary occasion, but which he was too perturbed just now to take any interest in or indeed pay any attention to, beyond the spasmodic "yes" or "no" the Doctor presumably expected.

"I hadn't the pleasure of your company yesterday morning at breakfast, Pearson."

It was what the wretched youngster had been waiting for. And however suave the questioning voice, he laid no flattering unction to his soul that the speaker had any other intention than of going into the matter with the utmost thoroughness.

"No, sir," he twittered.

"And why was that, now?" asked the Doctor.

"It" appeared to shrivel up. He half lagged behind, and then hurried forward. At one time it seemed as though he was going to take to his heels altogether. But the Doctor's long, swinging stride managed to keep pace with these gymnastics without an effort.

"I forgot to come, sir," he said at last.

There was a long pause—so long that it got more than "It" could stand at last, and he threw a look sideways and upwards in the Doctor's face. It took a long time to get there, though. Somehow his companion seemed further away than he had been yesterday.

The Doctor made no direct comment. But he looked rather closely into "It's" eyes, which perhaps he wasn't so very far wrong in thinking showed traces of recent weeping as he asked:

"Did you sleep well last night, Pearson?"

"No, sir," said "It," glad to get something

at last to which he could return a truthful answer.

"Thinking about having to forget to come, this morning, I suppose," suggested the Doctor.

This so exactly described the state of the case, that the little boy's "Yes, sir," slipped out involuntarily. He then looked so alarmed that the Doctor discovered all—or almost all—that he wanted to know.

"It wasn't necessary to lie to me, Pearson," was his next remark. "Wouldn't the truth have served you better? Or if there are certain things one is bound in honour not to disclose, one can always say so, can't one?"

As the Doctor said it, the little boy realised that he had missed a very easy way out of his difficulties. A big resolve began to form itself in his mind. Farquhar's veiled threats didn't seem to matter, in comparison with getting back the friend he had found yesterday.

"I'll come to-morrow, sir, whatever they—whatever happens, I mean," he burst out.

The Doctor laughed. "But as it happens I shan't ask you to-morrow, my dear little boy," he said. "I only give my invitations where they are prized. And I prefer boys—even little ones like you—who have the pluck to carry out what they have undertaken

at any cost. Also, I have a distinct prejudice against guests who tell lies. So that between now and my next invitation, there is rather a big score to be wiped off, isn't there?"

With that he gravely said good-bye, and "It," as he touched his cap, felt quite the most miserable person in the world.

The Doctor walked home rather thoughtfully. When he entered his study and rang for Joseph, there was a little laugh about the corners of his mouth. But it was a hard-set, fighting sort of mouth, all the same, that might have made some people shrink.

"Where is Master Farquhar, do you know, Joseph?" he asked.

Joseph eyed him gloomily. The old servant resented his presence there quite as keenly as did the boys. But he answered with all outward respect:

"In the senior common-room, sir. I now seed him as I passed the window."

"Admirable!" said the Doctor, although his reason for satisfaction was beyond Joseph to discover. "Well, go to him at once, give him my compliments, and say I shall be pleased to see him to breakfast with me to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock.

"I think," said the Head of St. Osyth's, with that small smile, still lingering about his mouth, "that things will now begin to move!"

CHAPTER X

A LESSON IN MANNERS

"Please, sir, the Doctor's compliments, and will you breakfast with him to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock?"

The message fell on the senior common-room with the effect of a bomb. Everyone with one accord left whatever legitimate, or other employment, they were engaged on, and waited in a fever of curiosity for the dumfounded Captain's response. The latter, for the first time in St. Osyth's experience of him, seemed to find the situation as difficult as though he had been an ordinary mortal.

"Is he waiting for an answer, Joseph?" he asked almost hesitatingly.

"Can't say, sir," answered old Joseph gloomily. Long service at St. Osyth's had made him a privileged person there. From the boys' point of view he was a treasure beyond price, as he could always be relied on to keep them up in the Head-master's movements, or unravel for them the innermost workings of his mind. Not, let us hasten to add, that Joseph demeaned himself by listening at doors, or anything of that kind. No,

he took the nobler course of standing well inside the room, and obtaining such information as he wanted with the most engaging candour. His way of handing his master his letters in the morning might have proved quite an entertainment to anyone unacquainted with his little peculiarities, although the old Doctor was far too used to him to think anything of it. He would take them from the salver, one by one, with a "This is from Mr. Baker, sir—another complaint against the young gentlemen, I fear—but there! an ill-conditioned person like him will have his grumble. And this here appears to be from Master Pearson's ma, sir—the matron was remarking only the other day that his undervests, being thin, might account for his catching cold so frequent—feels like a cheque inside, sir"—fingering it—"so perhaps it is to remedy the defect. And this, sir," holding it up to the light and shaking his head regretfully—"I cannot recognise the handwriting of, nor see who it is from, look at it how I will!"

Such being Joseph's little ways, one can understand that under the new regime he found many of his harmless pleasures curtailed. His wrongs had been smouldering within him during the last week, and he now proceeded to pour them forth into the young gentlemen's sympathetic ears.

"Whether he's waiting for an answer, Master

Farquhar, I carn't say—with certainty, that is," he repeated. "A gentleman, wot after you've give him a letter, or showed in a visitor, says 'Thank you, Joseph—that will do,' meaning it as a 'int—I couldn't undertake to answer for."

"Well, how did he put it, Joseph—if it won't commit you too much!" enquired Spratt.

"Well, sir," returned Joseph, "he says to me 'Joseph, do you know where Master Farquhar is at present?' 'He is in the senior common-room, sir,' I answers, meaning no harm, Master Farquhar. 'I now seed him as I pass the window.' Then he began to laugh, at nothing as far as I could see. 'Admirable!' he says, without explaining hisself. 'You go and give him my message, Joseph.' Which I have done, sir, verbum sap, as the saying is. Though whether he's expecting an answer or not, is more than I can say."

"Well, serve him out, Joseph. If he doesn't want to confide the secrets of his private life to you, show him you don't want to know them. Score off him that way!" advised Nugent encouragingly.

Farquhar sat swinging his foot to and fro, for all the world as though he had been a Bleater. "There's no answer, Joseph," he said at last.

"Do you mind St. George having asked 'It' before you, as much as all that?" enquired Nugent sympathetically. Since Ayscough had pointed out the Doctor's resemblance to the central figure in the hall window, the school had rather taken the name up. Needless to say they applied it in derision. A Head-master who could give them their heads, to the extent the Doctor had been doing lately, was just the visionary sort of person who *would* be in a stained glass window they felt.

Farquhar took no notice of the chaff. "Why the beggar wants to stuff his precious invitations down my throat, floors me," he observed to the rest in a tone whose loftiness was marred by a slight tinge of uneasiness.

"Well, somebody must eat up the things he got in for 'It.' " This reasonable suggestion was Curwen's.

He was standing at some distance from Farquhar, so nothing happened. "He must have known I shouldn't take the thing on when he asked me," went on the latter, continuing his worried soliloquy.

"Perhaps that's the reason he *did* ask you," Nugent hazarded.

"Well, anyway, I'm not going!" Having got this momentous decision off his chest, the Captain seemed to breathe more freely.

"How shall you break it to him?" Nugent

was beginning, when Farquhar, apparently deciding that somebody should pay for the uncomfortable time he had just been through, proceeded to fire off quite a number of home-truths at him. He had suffered a good deal from Nugent, one way or another, so that the exercise was all the more exhilarating.

"It's easy enough to sit tight and sneer," he stormed. "You're always at it. But it's cheap. And if you steer clear of rows yourself, that's not to say you don't break every rule there is. Oh, don't think I don't twig why you keep that *orange wine* you say your aunt sends you locked up, and why you chew filthy tea-leaves before coming into class, and why that blackguardly barman from the King's Head's always hanging about the place, just before a race, and why——"

"How you know the ropes, Fardy!" put in Nugent admiringly.

If the Captain hadn't been in such a rage, he would have realized that in admitting his knowledge of these singularities of Nugent's, he was also admitting his own slackness in having allowed them. But like other very self-important people he couldn't stand chaff, and in consequence of Nugent's known gifts in that direction had left him as severely alone as he decently could.

But for once he let himself go.

"Do I?" he retorted resentfully. "Well, there's one thing I don't know as well as you, it seems, and that's how to make things : jolly safe for myself."

"Some people might call it my natural cleverness!" Nugent intimated placidly.

"Well, that's not my name for it," Farquhar snapped back. "What I call it, is skulking. You'd see other fellows painting the whole place red and egg them on: but I'd like to see you as much as raise a finger to help yourself, if there was a chance of your being nipped."

"Would you, Fardy?" asked Nugent, languidly interested. "Well, painting's messy work. But anything to oblige. So if there's any little object you want touched up, don't hesitate to mention it."

Noad tittered. "You're only gassing though," he was heard to murmur disappointedly.

"Think so?" asked Nugent coolly. "Well, Fardy, is it to be the school clock, or the doctor, or Noad, here, who is to be operated on with the pink? Or shall we say that bay mare of the Doctor's? By the way, a very pretty taste in horse-flesh seems to be St. George's chief, one might say his only point."

"Good business!" "You old idiot!"
"Go ahead, old chap!" "You *are* a nailer!"

"Not good enough, I tell you!" "Won't the Doctor be frightfully sick just! Rough on the gee!" "How'll you work it?" The exclamations flew round according to the type of mind of the individual who uttered them.

"I shan't hurt the gee—don't be alarmed. And how I'm going to work it's my business, Farquhar didn't finish the list of my accomplishments, you know!" Nugent assured them serenely.

"Don't be a goat! There'll be an awful flare-up—bound to be," said Farquhar hesitatingly. He found the responsibilities of his official position, and his hatred of the new Doctor, awkward things to reconcile nowadays.

"Oh, but I can cover up my tracks, you know. Isn't that what all your compliments have been about?" Nugent inquired innocently.

Again, the next morning, Mr. Fitz-Herbert partook of an excellent meal in solitary state. Still he did not let the fact weigh on either his appetite or his temper. When it was over he sent for old Joseph.

"Did you give Master Farquhar my message, Joseph?" he asked.

Joseph eyed the empty place, which he himself had laid for Master Farquhar, with singular intentness. Then he answered, as

one who understands a situation in all its bearings, and enjoys it :

"Yes, sir !"

"And what was his answer?" asked the Doctor.

"There was no answer, sir," said Joseph with such an evident and spiteful pleasure in the reply that the Head glanced at him. But though he only said, "That will do, Joseph," the old man left the room feeling slightly crestfallen, and wondering if, after all, he had gone too far.

It was at this moment that Bates, the Doctor's own servant, sent an urgent request that he might be allowed to see him on important business. He wouldn't give it a name, Joseph added, evidently resentful.

Like Joseph, Bates was an old family servant. But unlike the latter, he had not spread his affections, but had concentrated them solidly on the Doctor. At present he was his groom, gardener, and valet, all rolled into one. When one adds that he had put the Doctor on his first pony, it will be understood that his acquaintanceship with him dated rather far back.

He came in now, almost speechless with indignation and outraged pride.

"I don't know how to tell 'ee, sir," he said. "If I hadn't seen 'er with my own eyes, I'd never 'a believed it. But this morning, if

I didn't find that blessed mare——" He hesitated.

"Well, Bates?" the Doctor's tone was as even as ever, but a little tense. The mare was an old friend.

"Red, sir," said Bates, "From 'er forelock to 'er feet."

"Not blood?" the Doctor was on his feet.

"No, sir—paint. As I'm a living man. From 'er forelock to 'er feet, and her tail tied that impident, with ribbons to match." Here Bates wiped his forehead, which was certainly in need of the attention.

"You're sure she's not injured in any way?" the Doctor persisted anxiously. He and the mare had had too many good days together, over one of the stiffest hunting counties in England, for her well-being not to mean a good deal to him.

"Not physical, sir," Bates assured him. "But what'll happen to 'er temper's mor'n I can say. An' 'er that was allus so set on her looks, and as used to step out as though the whole o' the royal family was a-looking on. And how's the stuff ever going to be got off? An' me with my other work——"

"Don't be afraid, Bates. A jar of turpentine and some hard scrubbing will soon put matters right, I trust. But that part of the business will not fall on your shoulders," the Doctor assured him rather grimly. "Don't

touch those ribbons you spoke of, until I have seen the mare myself. And keep the stable door locked. There is no need to provide St. Osyth's with a circus in school hours, although I've no doubt the young rascals would enjoy it."

That morning the Doctor took the Sixth in Greek for the first time. He was so unruffled that they could only suppose that he had not yet discovered the surprising metamorphosis that had overtaken his steed during the night, rumours of which had already assailed their delighted ears. When it also transpired that the Captain had actually refused to break bread with the owner of the animal, their cup of joy was full. Or would have been full, rather, if one could have got more sparks, so to speak, out of the victim. It took the edge off the joke that the person who seemed the least affected by it should be the aggrieved party himself.

It said a good deal for the Doctor's powers as a teacher that, in spite of these delirious excitements, he managed to get them interested in the lesson. Under his guidance the Iliad ceased to be a dry-as-dust collection of nouns and verbs, forming tiresome models for construes, and became instead a vivid arena of moving and splendid figures, fighting great fights and dying high heroic deaths. And then he seemed to have

such really square views too, about the totally unfair use the gods and goddesses made of their exceptional advantages over the mortals.

"Apollo, again!" he said, as they came across that personage, pushing back somebody's spear—Diomed's, I think—just as he was going to make a really good thrust.

"If they had only stood out, it would have been so much more sporting, wouldn't it, sir?" asked someone involuntarily. It wasn't the sort of thing that was usually said in class. Really the speaker must have forgotten where he was, and that the person to whom he had directed his remark was a social pariah like the Doctor.

"Just my view," said the latter with a heartiness which seemed to show that if he didn't do decent things himself, he had at least the grace to admire them in other people. And now he pointed it out, what sportsmen those old Iliad heroes were, to be sure! For instance, when Andromache was trying to prevent Hector from going into battle for some weak, womanish reason, which everyone in the class found wholly inadequate, although the Doctor seemed to think that being sold as a slave might have its disadvantages, and Hector answered:

"One thing I cannot bear, that any son or daughter of Troy should see me flinching

from the battle. The very thought offends me: I must always be in the front!" they cordially approved of him. Yes, undoubtedly Hector was a sportsman. The Doctor seemed to admire the right kind.

After the lesson was over, there was a little tense pause. The class seemed to come back from a long ago which had been made warm and living and human to them, to the thrilling episodes which were affecting their own private lives. What was the Doctor going to do? Was he going to haul the Captain out there and then, and demand a specific reason for his refusal to share with him the rites of hospitality, or was he going to parade before them, in all its unholy glory, the roseate-tinted animal whom Bates was so barbarously keeping from their sight. He wasn't good for much as a Head master, of course, although he managed to hide the fact very creditably in class, but he wasn't going to let this pass, surely?

But it seemed he was. He had been polite, though not effusive, to the Captain in the few times when he had had occasion to speak to him in class. But he never mentioned the personal breach between them, nor did he, by so much as a syllable, allude to the florid tone so unexpectedly acquired by his mare.

"I'd give something to find out if the

Johnny really does know or not?" said Berkeley. He didn't say what he was referring to. There was no need.

"Oh, he knows, right enough," answered Nugent, quite seriously for him. But they couldn't get out of him what he meant.

Farquhar's turn came first. As on the previous day, old Joseph entered the senior common room, as though he had waded there through the Slough of Despond.

"Will you go to the Doctor, at once, sir, in the study?"

They were used to Joseph's tragic periods by this time. But this message surely was rather different from the rest.

"Sounds as though St. George was coming out of it, at last," observed Nugent, by way of cheering Farquhar up.

The latter rose, with his head high, and a little laugh of bravado on his lips.

"All right, Joseph!" he answered.

"He said at once! sir," croaked Joseph. "He sounded more determineder than I've yet heard him."

"Oh, get out, Joseph!" growled Farquhar, not receiving the communication in the obliging spirit in which it was offered.

"Very good, sir," said Joseph, offended. He had evidently another piece of news that he was dying to impart, and he seemed to look particularly at Nugent, or perhaps it

was only that gentleman's guilty conscience that made him think so. But whatever information he possessed, he decided not to give them the benefit of it, and with another "*Very good, sir,*" that conveyed volumes, departed.

If Farquhar wasn't exactly strong in his own integrity, he had at any rate a very good nerve of his own. Still, it is possible that his pulse may have quickened a shade as he entered the study.

"Ah, Farquhar," said the Doctor. His voice was the refined, easy one that the Captain knew, but it would have been difficult for the latter to have discovered much of the syrupy quality in it to which he had so strongly objected. The Doctor didn't ask him to sit down, he noticed. Evidently the interview was not going to take a pleasant form.

"I sent you an invitation to breakfast with me this morning, Farquhar?" said the Doctor interrogatively and calmly, with that level look of his.

There was a pause. Farquhar couldn't deny the allegation, and didn't want to. So he said:

"Yes, sir," as airily as he could. Perhaps in his efforts to make the Doctor understand how much at ease he was, he went further than he intended, and made his reply more jaunty than he knew.

"You did not return an answer?" The Doctor's own quiet voice was singularly at variance with Farquhar's defiant one.

"No, sir," answered the Captain. "I didn't come because——"

The Doctor put up his hand, with the slightest, most casual air of protest. "My dear Farquhar!" he deprecated. "My message was an invitation, not a command. There was no earthly reason why you should not have declined it, if you wished to. Please do not trouble to explain your reasons."

Checked in his stride like this, Farquhar stared at him with his ideas going from him.

"No," continued the Doctor, in his bland, conversational way, "it was not to find out your reason for declining that I sent for you to-day, believe me. It was because of that little matter of your not having sent a written, or verbal reply. Unfortunately, manners come under the school curriculum, and as the subject is one for which I am directly responsible, I thought it kinder to tell you that in polite society it is customary on receiving an invitation to send back either an acceptance or a refusal. Neglect of little social courtesies of this kind would always be considered bad form. For your own sake, it is better to put you right on these little points at the start. That is all. I need not detain you any longer."

Reader, if you could have seen Farquhar's face as he stood there, boiling with rage, bereft of speech, and feeling that either he or the Doctor must have gone stark staring mad. Little social courtesies of this kind! Customary in polite society! Considered bad form! Kinder for his own sake! The Doctor couldn't realise who he was speaking to, surely!

"You can go, Farquhar!" the Doctor reminded him icily. He turned back to his desk. And as Farquhar couldn't direct a fusilade at his back, even had the right words come to him, he had to trail off. But just as he was at the door the Doctor turned, and, almost as though it was an afterthought, said:

"Oh, by the way, will you ask Nugent to come to me now!"

CHAPTER XI

MAKING THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME

The Captain went back to the common-room in no very pleasant temper.

"He wants *you* now!" he said gruffly to Nugent.

"Well, I hope, after this, nobody'll ever call him unsociable!" remarked Nugent, lazily rising to his feet. "But what's the matter, old chap? You don't mean to say you've let our little St. George ruffle your feathers?"

But it seemed that the Captain had let the personage so designated ruffle his feathers very considerably. "Hang the brute!" he snarled. "Thank goodness, I've not to live with him like the rest of you chaps have. But I'll be even with him, all the same. I've still got three weeks."

"Why, what's he done to you, then?" cried a chorus of eager voices.

"Never you mind!" answered Farquhar, with a suspicious unwillingness to allay their pangs of natural curiosity. "But perhaps he'll wish he hadn't, before I've done with him!"

The Captain's incomprehensible attitude

rather sobered Nugent, as he made his way to the gentleman who, it seemed, desired his attendance. Still, it didn't chase the mocking smile from his lips, or destroy the impression that in the proceedings of the next half-hour he would find much to interest him. He looked straight at the Doctor as he went in. The Doctor looked straight back at him. It was as though the two had measured swords.

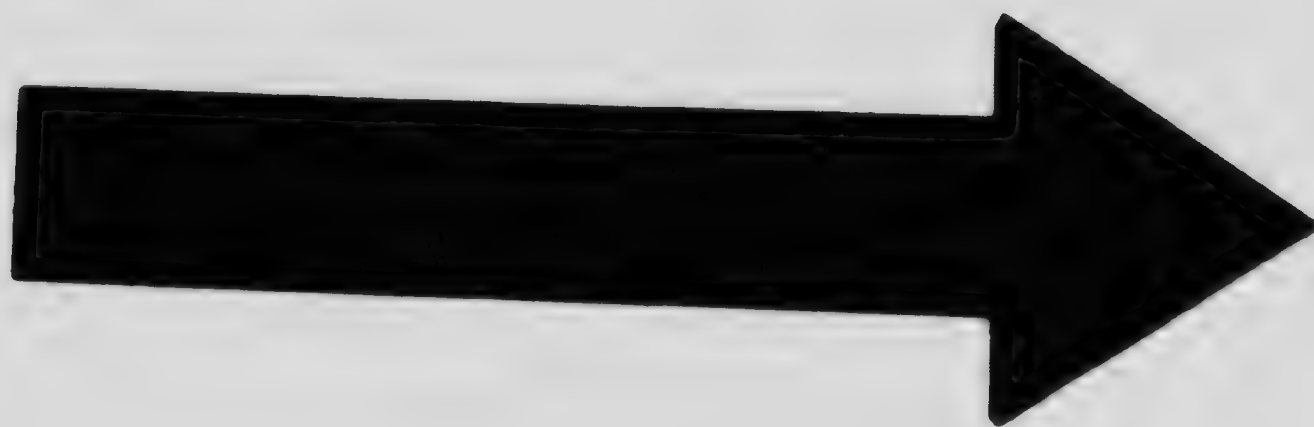
The Head of St. Osyth's took from his desk some streamers of vermilion cloth, which only that very morning had been adorning his mare's tail, in shape of two large and airy bows.

"I have sent for you, for several reasons, Nugent," he said. "One of them is to return you your property."

He held out the trophies in his pupil's direction, but the latter made no effort to take them. Instead, he stared at the flying streamers, which in their flamboyant colouring really did seem to justify Bates' epithet of "impident," with an effect of mildly wondering if the Doctor was often taken with this sort of delusion.

"My property, sir?" he drawled.

"Well, your uncle's, to be quite accurate," said the Doctor. "It was part of an old hunting-coat of his, wasn't it, before it was pressed into the service of my mare?"



Again the two measured swords.

"What makes you suppose, sir, that I had anything to do with your mare's—toilet?" asked Nugent gently. He might almost have been humouring a confirmed imbecile from his tone.

"Many reasons, Nugent," the Doctor told him. He sat down as he spoke in such a position that the boy was directly facing him. He didn't ask Nugent to sit down too. But the latter, with his hand resting on the edge of the big desk, almost lolling against it, in fact, stood in the easiest attitude before him.

At the Doctor's last remark Nugent slightly raised his eyebrows. One could scarcely call it a request for information, it was too happily insolent for that. It was more like an amiable intimation that if the Doctor felt any desire to unburden himself of these reasons, he was quite willing to listen. This was a very different kind of defiance from Farquhar's. It bore about the same resemblance to it as a polished rapier does to a blunderbuss. But as for having any visible effect on the Doctor's temper, the result of both methods of attack was the same.

"There was one reason, though, that at first disinclined me to admit the possibility of its being you," went on the Doctor, the words falling very distinctly. "I did not think that

whatever you might do, or leave undone, you would have stooped to collusion with a servant, in a matter of this kind."

"A servant, sir?" repeated Nugent in his politely encouraging way. But a tinge of red had come into the clear ivory of his face, nevertheless.

The Doctor ignored the little interruption. "Still, I quite realise," he went on tolerantly, and as one who could be just, even to a reptile, "that when you sent Joseph to get you the red paint, you had no intention of getting him into trouble."

"Did Joseph say he'd been after red paint, sir?" asked Nugent, mildly interested at last, apparently.

"He didn't mention it!" answered the Doctor, eyeing the inquirer rather steadily. "But as he came to me with his clothes reeking with turpentine, I concluded that he had been lately engaged in removing certain incriminating stains."

"Turpentine is a very common domestic article, they tell me, sir," Nugent advanced tentatively. "Its uses are not confined, I believe, to displacing paint-stains. Still——" He didn't finish the sentence. But a little whimsical upward lurch of his eyebrows conveyed his full permission to the Doctor to make any inquiries he liked on the subject.

"You think it would be easy for me to find out by asking Joseph himself?" asked the Doctor, always good-temperedly. "Well, there we differ, Nugent. I should have the strongest objection to question a servant on any matter connected with one of my prefects, when I could obtain the information at first hand."

A second touch of red in Nugent's cheeks seemed to indicate that, for all his coolness, the Doctor had again got home.

"There is a refreshing simplicity about certain other of your methods, too, Nugent," the Doctor continued, and there was a suspicion of laughter in the words, although you could not have placed it exactly, "that almost encourages one to hope that this is the first enterprise of the kind you have embarked in. For instance, when you tie a bow to my mare's tail—and a very good bow, too—which is made from a strip of an old hunting coat from which you have neglected to remove the tailor's tab"—Nugent started—"and when that tailor happens to be my own—and when a telegraphic message puts me in possession of the names of half-a-dozen of his customers to whom the coat might possibly belong—and when one of these happens to be your uncle—the identity of the artist who tried to improve nature in the case of my mare isn't so very difficult to find out, is it?"

Nugent bit his lip. The Doctor had got it all so wickedly pat. The coat *had* belonged to his uncle. He had begged it from him for some school theatricals which had never come off. And as it made a really chaste scheme of colour with the paint, and as no one at St. Osyth's was even aware of its existence, he had fished it out from the bottom of an old box, and torn it into strips. That one piece of carelessness, in not noticing the tab, had been his undoing. And when he remembered all the elaborate precautions he had taken the night before, not to let a drop of paint get on his clothes, nor even to leave a finger print on any part of his handiwork, and what a smart fellow he had thought himself, the calm composure which had sustained him up to this point gave way.

"You ought to have been a detective, sir," he muttered bitterly.

For a minute a flash like blue steel came from the Doctor's eyes. Then he said, very quietly, but very impressively too :

"Qualities of that kind are not an unnecessary equipment for the Head-master of St. Osyth's, it seems, Nugent. When you understand me better, you will realise how heartily I dislike work of that kind. At present, it will be enough for you to know that I overlook the discourtesy of your remark."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Nugent.

"That's better!" said the Doctor. "Now we can begin!"

Quite unconsciously, Nugent had taken his hand off the desk. He had ceased to loll. To an observer who knew nothing of the circumstances, it might almost have seemed that he was standing at attention.

"Now, Nugent," said the Doctor, "let us understand each other quite clearly. What you did last night was both impertinent and annoying. Still, I do not consider it a serious offence in itself. I prefer to regard it more as an ebullition of youthful high spirits, than anything else. And it is from this point of view that I shall set the penalty."

Nugent didn't drawl "The penalty, sir?" as he would have done at an earlier stage of the proceedings. But it would have been difficult to imagine anything more supercilious than his enquiring glance.

"Why, of course," said the Doctor, in what seemed real surprise, "you didn't think you would be able to get your fun—for I presume it was fun—without paying for it, did you?"

Nugent didn't say what he had expected, or not expected, but merely waited and not with any conspicuous meekness, for what was to come.

"Considering it, as I do, merely an out-

break of youthful mischief," continued the Doctor, "I must still ask you to make the mischief good. Your apparently extensive knowledge on the subject of turpentine should be of use to you."

"I don't understand, sir," said Nugent proudly.

"Oh, I think you do, Nugent," the Doctor told him. "You have chosen to bestow a geranium-coloured coat on my mare. Now, since I have a prejudice in favour of her original bay, I shall expect you to restore her to that colour with your own hands."

"I shall never do that, sir," said the boy, his scornful head very high.

For a minute or so the Doctor was silent. His thoughts seemed to be rather far away. When he spoke his voice didn't sound angry. Only very grave, and somehow kind.

"You force me to mention the alternative then, Nugent," he said.

Nugent didn't ask him what it was. But in the waiting pause, his face got a little strained.

"And that is that you leave for home by the next train."

After that incisive sentence had bitten itself into Nugent's brain, he opened his mouth to make a wild offer to give some—no, all—his pocket money to get the thing done by other and more menial hands. But

meeting the Doctor's eye the words went unspoken. Evidently there was to be no appeal. The Doctor meant what he said. It was to be this—this—*unspeakable* indignity, or what he himself would have described as "the chuck!" That he, a prefect, should be asked to do what would make him the laughing-stock of every fag in the place, and the bye-word of future generations—oh, he knew how St. Osyth's treasured up little intellectual treats of this kind—was utterly unthinkable. But the next train home!

As he stood there with face almost contorted with rage and shame, the Doctor spoke again.

"Nugent, I happen to know the circumstances of your home life. I am a personal friend of your uncle's. I have also had the honour and pleasure of meeting your mother."

This was news to Nugent. His uncle was very well known indeed, not only in military circles, but to the whole of Greater Britain. In South Africa his corps, "Nugent's Horse," had been a name to conjure with. His men adored him. But Nugent had never heard that he spoilt them.

Nor could he be said to have spoilt this young nephew of his, whose father was dead, and who was popularly supposed to stand to him in the place of a son. But the General

was a simple, soldierly sort of person, to whom Nugent's vicious tastes were peculiarly abhorrent, and who in consequence was inclined to shut his eyes to such fine points as the boy had. Nugent and his mother, too, were utterly dependent on him. Nugent was spoken of by strangers as the General's heir, but the estates were unentailed, and the General himself had never made even the slightest allusion to any such disposition of his property. The General had been disappointed in Nugent for some time, and at the end of last holidays had explained the fact to him if not at length at least in vigour and pithiness of phrase. He was also beginning to state his idea of the Army, to enter which was Nugent's one passionate ambition, would be wasted upon such as he, when Nugent's mother began to cry, and so shut him up, for the time being.

"Your uncle talked to me about you, before I came down here, Nugent." The Doctor's voice brought Nugent sharply back to present conditions. "He is not pleased with you. You know best whether his dissatisfaction is deserved or not. He understands your longing to go into the Army—it is just what he would understand, you know. But he thinks that with a nature like yours, the temptations of the life would be too great.

I told him——" The speaker paused, and then said almost boyishly, as if he did not want to gain any advantage in the present position, by laying Nugent under any debt of gratitude to him, "Well, never mind what I told him. At any rate, you are to have another chance. I tell you all this because I want you to realise what might happen if you went home—in the way I have indicated."

"It's not fair!" Nugent burst out.

In his trouble the boy was shedding his man-of-the-world manner and vocabulary, and reverting to the ways and speech of his youth.

"What is not fair?" asked the Doctor sternly. "That I should persuade you to choose the course which will alone allow you to remain here? My dear boy, you must at least give me the credit of being disinterested in the matter. You can scarcely flatter yourself that St. Osyth's would be the loser by your absence, while my own very difficult task here would be considerably lightened by it."

That was plain speaking, and Nugent winced under it, while vainly trying to find some way of escape.

"My uncle wouldn't want me to do the work of a groom!" he at length said desperately.

"I should hardly class it under ordinary

groom's work myself." observed the Doctor dispassionately. "Still, that is not the point. And from my knowledge of your uncle, if you went home to-night with a tale like that, he would put you into a dog-cart, drive you over here himself, tell you to take your punishment like a man, and stand over you till it was done. 'Nick Nugent'"—the Doctor laughed to himself, as he quoted a name which Nugent knew his uncle went by among his men—"doesn't go in for half-measures. But we mustn't let it come to that," he added in a cheerful, helpful sort of way. "And believe me, my boy, when you have made your decision—and a right one, I am sure it will be—I shall give you credit for having made it for someone else's sake, as well as your own."

He didn't mention Nugent's mother. He had kept her out of the discussion. But it was easy enough to know who he meant. He let his eye travel slowly over Nugent's graceful, erect figure, then said:

"I can't help you in this, Nugent. It's the sort of thing you've got to fight out for yourself. For your own sake, my boy, you *must* learn your lesson. But—but don't let it be on an office stool." There was something indescribably winning in the impulsive utterance.

He had won, of course. He saw it in the

shrinking of the boy's shoulders and the downward droop of the arrogant eyes. And he made it easy for him.

"Here's the key of the stable, Nugent," he said. "You can keep it locked, if you like, while you're at work. The mare might object to St. Osyth's seeing her in her present war paint."

Nugent took the key without a word. He dangled it restlessly on his finger for a minute without speaking. It was still war to the knife between the Doctor and himself. The latter had won his point in the present instance, but Nugent's wasn't the sort of nature to be broken by one fall. But the same proud quality in the boy which had brought the Doctor an apology from him just now, for a rude and unjust speech, made him unable to avail himself of the cover afforded under the Doctor's jesting words, without some sort of acknowledgment. And he meant to avail himself of it, be sure. He knew even better than Mr. FitzHerbert the joyous satisfaction with which St. Osyth's would have constituted itself into an audience of the proceedings.

"Thank you, sir!" he got out at last. The speech had so bitter a tang that it almost sounded like the retort courteous levelled by sarcastic-minded prisoners at the judge, after sentence.

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But the Doctor's little nod showed that he had taken it in the way that it was meant.

"And now send Hy 'ie, please," he said.

Really it seemed as though the Head of St. Osyth's was in for a busy day!

CHAPTER XII

"RAGGING OLD PHILLPOTT"

"It's your turn now, Scissors?" said Nugent, coming back to the common-room. He could scarcely have been enjoying himself, they thought, judging by his looks.

"Turn for what?" asked Hythe, not unnaturally.

"Paying your state call. It's the Doctor's 'At Home' day, you know," Nugent answered. It was the first time, by the way, that he had ever given Mr. FitzHerbert his official title. It was wonderful how naturally it slipped out now.

"Well, for a chap who's kept on doin' nothin' at all since he's been here, Georgy's rather going it, don't you think?" asked Berkeley.

"Doing nothin' at all!" Nugent's tone was expressive.

"Well, what do you call it, then?" retorted Berkeley, nettled.

If Nugent had been an Israelite of old, he might have made answer, "Spying out the nakedness of the land." Being provided by

the circumstances of his life with other metaphors, he made answer :

" Drawing the covers ! "

" What did I tell you ? " asked Gegechkory excitedly. " Are not my words becoming the naked truth ? Did I not say, if ever I see a first-class tyr-r-ant, in my life, he is the identical. He must be rolled in the dust. "

" That's talking, Pony ! " said Nugent admiringly.

" No, but seriously, you chaps, " put in Farquhar, " if we don't buck up, and do something, Georgy'll be thinking that he can walk over us. "

" 'Sh ! Don't let them know that that's just what he is doing, " breathed Spratt, in a stage whisper. He had apparently studied the demeanour of the Doctor's guests to some purpose.

But all this was an interruption to what they wanted to find out from Nugent. " Tell us what he wanted you for, Nugent, there's a good chap ! " they cried, crowding round. " Did he try to get at you about the gee ? " " Has he got his back up ? " " Does he twig anything ? " " How did you put him off ? "

From the trend of the questions, it will be perceived that it had never dawned on anyone present that Nugent would have let himself be caught so early in the day, or that if caught

he had not provided some way of escape. But for a person who might have told so moving a tale, Nugent was singularly inexpressive. And it was noticeable that nobody repeated their questions. Nugent's manner was not such as to encourage them to do so.

Meanwhile, Hythe was making his way to the Doctor's study in considerable personal bewilderment. Nothing had transpired to make him suppose that the Doctor would have recognised him in the street if he had met him, much less that he knew him by name. If Farquhar and Nugent were any guide, he was not likely to derive much pleasure from the interview. Still, pleasure wasn't a sensation he connected with Headmasters. It had really seemed to be one of the minor occupations of the old Doctor's life to point out his deficiencies, mental or otherwise. But he had usually chosen the more public moments of Hythe's life in which to bestow his pin-pricks. Hythe could not remember a time when he had been specially invited to the study to have disagreeable things said to him.

"Sit down, Hythe," said the Doctor. He didn't look as formidable as the state in which he had returned Farquhar and Nugent would have led one to suppose. "There is a little matter I want to talk to you about.

This letter"—he took up an historic document which Hythe had no difficulty in recognising—"was addressed to the trustees, who forwarded it to me. I see your signature is attached to it. But what I want to know is if you actually penned the production."

So that was it. Hythe took rather a firm seat in the chair the Doctor had pointed out, and his shoulders involuntarily squared themselves a little. "I signed it, sir," he answered; "it's the same thing."

"Oh, pardon me," returned the Doctor. "It is a very different thing indeed. I don't in the least object to your having signed it, Hythe. You did not know me at the time, and you did know my predecessor. One must always stick to one's friends. Besides, you boys seem to have been labouring under a misconception. I think, myself, that the trustees have made far too much of a trifling indiscretion of this kind. Why I particularly wanted to know was in the interests of your English Essay, for the coming examination. Because if you really had perpetrated such an achievement, we should have had to work very hard to correct your faults of style, and the fatal infallibility that always stamps very youthful work."

Pleasant for the Captain, this! It really seemed a pity that the remarks should have

been addressed to the one person in St. Osyth's who would not have made it the business of his life to repeat them to him word for word.

The Doctor looked over the letter again and seemed to be reading out choice bits to himself "Extreme undesirability of his taking any such step," "cannot imagine any gentleman accepting the offer under the circumstances." He left off at this point to bend his glance on this quiet visitor of his. "The writer of this letter appears to take himself very seriously, Hythe," he observed.

"Yes, sir," Hythe agreed.

The Doctor went back to the letter again "Cambridge man would alone prove a serious disqualification" "under no circumstances could Mr. FitzHerbert's appointment be received here without serious opposition." "the grave mistake you have in contemplation." the reader made quite a long pause here. "May I ask, Hythe, if by any chance you noticed the extremely modest tone of this piece of literature?"

A sudden irrepressible grin spread itself about Hythe's face. "It didn't knock me, sir," he answered stolidly.

"Then why did you put your name to it?" The Doctor almost whirled the question at him. Hythe would always be able to under-



“There are some things a fellow can't explain to you, sir! That's one of them.”

stand what Ayscough meant by comparing his eyes to gimlets.

Hythe threw back his head in rather a badgered way. He didn't put his hands in his pockets, but he stiffened them on his knees. Then he gave the Doctor a long look, and the next minute he found himself saying quite naturally :

" There are some things a fellow can't explain to—to—a person like you, sir ! That's one of them."

" Very well," answered the Doctor. Hythe with his hands clenched on his knees, and his chin stuck out until it was almost in a line with his nose, was virtually defying him. But it was wonderful how well he took it. It made one think of a certain piece of advice he had given to " It," as to how to comport oneself in a similar predicament.

" Very well," he repeated. " We will leave it at that. It was for personal reasons, as well as for the sake of your essay, that I wanted to find out. But I don't pay you such a poor compliment, Hythe, as not to believe that you would tell me if you could. That ends the matter. And now, I think the best thing we can do with this work of art is to put it in the fire." He tore it across, as he spoke, and watched it blaze, with a look that was half funny and half sad.

That done, he turned to Hythe in the

pleasantest way. Evidently he was a man of his word. The whole business was at an end. He had treated this Sixth Form boy of his as though he was a man and a gentleman. A Head-master who could do that was, as Hythe felt, the right sort.

"So, I hear you are a great stamp-collector, Hythe?" he said. As Nugent observed later, it would have been interesting to find out what he had *not* heard in that idle week of his. "Well, that's a great point of interest between us. It is my own pet hobby. I must show you my collection some day, and I should like to see y^o urs. Have you got an early Mauritius?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hythe eagerly. "It's rather a rare one too."

"I'd like to see it," said the Doctor. "I haven't got one myself, but I've got——"

The quarter of an hour or so until the Doctor dismissed him went very rapidly for Hythe. He was an enthusiast on the subject, but the Doctor was not only an enthusiast, but a specialist. So that, what with all this, by the time Hythe got back to the senior common-room he had almost forgotten the original cause for which he had been summoned. He was quite surprised to find everybody still there. He didn't realise at first that they had been waiting for him, to hear results.

His contented, preoccupied face was in strange contrast to those of the two who had preceded him.

"Well, we needn't have hung about to pick up the pieces, it seems!" observed Samborne, dryly.

"What did Georgy want to jaw you about?" asked Giffard, point blank.

"Oh, about stamps," answered Hythe, freeing himself with difficulty from the atmosphere of early Mauritius, and coming back to mundane things.

They stared at him disbelievingly.

"Don't rag," said Giffard. "You're never going to make me believe he had you in there just for that!"

"Oh, no," admitted Hythe. "It was the letter, to start with." For the moment, he had almost forgotten the earlier part of the interview.

"The letter!" They almost fell upon him. Such a nonchalant reference to a subject of such burning interest almost took their breath away.

"What on earth did he want to talk to *you* about it for?" exclaimed the Captain, highly offended.

"Ask me another!" answered Hythe. "He wanted to know why I'd signed it?"

"I suppose it didn't occur to him to wonder why *we'd* done the same thing?"

asked Nugent, in a voice which sounded as though it had been dipped in gall.

As a matter of fact Mr. FitzHerbert hadn't manifested any burning curiosity on the subject. But Hythe didn't see any necessity to rub the fact in.

"Of course you told him how you'd tried to talk us round, about not sending it, an' that?" sneered Nugent.

"What rot! You know I didn't," answered Hythe. He was keeping his temper wonderfully with Nugent to-day. "I just told him I couldn't tell him why I'd signed it, and that finished the thing."

"What did he say?" breathed the rest.

"Why, what could he say?" answered Hythe temperately. "He's enough of a sport to know he can't be told everything. So he just burnt the letter and said it was wiped out, an' that. Oh, and he didn't seem to think much of it, anyway. Called it a 'trifling indiscretion,' you know."

Human nature is a funny thing. Instead of being gratified at the intelligence, Farquhar suddenly went as red as a turkey-cock, and with a muttered, "That finishes it!" stalked from the room.

Now the Bleaters, sublimely unconscious that any change had come into the present idyllic, do-as-you-please condition of affairs, were having the time of their lives. They

had added so many new and attractive pursuits to their record in the last week that the charm of novelty had somewhat failed. Indeed, they had already begun to hark back to the old and well-loved pastimes of the days of yore. But since appetite grows by feeding, they had brought something of the new, adventurous spirit into the old games. Thus, when the ever popular summons, " Let's go and rag old Phillpott ! " was once more heard in the land, it meant a more daring raid on that worthy than had ever been attempted before.

Many pleasing forms of ragging were open to them. They might of course almost saw through the legs of his study chair, but as there would be literally nobody to see his fall, the idea was rejected as being too tantalising. They might draw a speaking likeness of him on the distempered walls of his study, but this had been done so often that it was difficult to find a fresh place. They might arrange a booby-trap over his door, but long victimising had made him expert in taking aggravating precautions with the door handle before entering. They might make ink-soup in his cap, but as on the last occasion of their doing so he had jammed the filthy compound bodily down on " It's " head, the latter's piteous entreaties that the exploit not be repeated were

allowed to weigh with them. And all these ingenious methods of warfare faded into the background before Giffard minor's brilliant suggestion of :

"Let's smoke him in !"

"Smoke him out, man, you mean !" corrected Ayscough.

"That's all you know about it !" retorted the other. And when he had finished explaining, they agreed with him.

It really was rather a finished scheme, although Giffard minor had not evolved it out of his own inner consciousness. He possessed a patriarchal relative who had been to Rugby, and who used to fight his battles o'er again by pouring into his young relation's delighted ears accounts of the sylvan joys with which, in the dim golden distance, the youth of Rugby had made jocund the days. It was he who had obligingly supplied the details of the present rag. Its ingredients were simple, including a slate, a plentiful supply of coals, a red-hot poker and some brimstone. The latter article, not kept on the premises, they were obliged to restrain their natural impatience until one of their number had been able to wheedle a permit out of one of the prefects—Ogle for choice, as being the easiest to get over. But even Ogle might not have been moved to give it so much by the fact that Ayscough was in

excruciating agonies of toothache and required the services of a dentist had it not been that he wanted his footer boots back, and that the dentist's operating-room was within a stone's throw of the shop where they were putting new studs in them, for him, as perhaps Ayscough, having ascertained the fact from "It," fully realised.

Still by six o'clock the next evening, when Phillpott had obligingly betaken himself to his study to do his evening prep. all was ready.

They had not been able to manage things quite by themselves. You see, the scheme required someone to get out on the leads, and stuff a slate over Phillpott's chimney. Though the spirit of the little boys was willing enough for the enterprise, their arms were not long enough. And as anything was better than to risk failure in a scheme so promising as this, they were obliged to take someone of a larger growth into their confidence. The task of selection was a delicate and dangerous one. If they chose anyone of *too* large a growth, the odds were that the enterprise would never come off at all, while the feat of balancing the slate on the chimney pot was literally above the reach of anyone of very tender years. But when Ayscough bethought him of the Admirable, everything became plain sailing.

Beyond mentioning the Admirable's admiration for Nugent, we have not yet had occasion to bring the enterprising youth who went under that name very prominently forward in the events we have been relating. Not that he was not a very great personage, in his way, and a real power. But being a Hittite, his misdeeds, which were as the sands of the sea for multitude, were mostly confined to the seclusion of his own house. It was one of the characteristics of the clan to hold themselves as it were aloof from the doing of the school at large. In ways that were dark, the Hittites could have given points to anyone. But when one is aping the manners of men of the world, one cannot of course afford to take the same wild interest in current events as though one were a mere school-boy.

Still, the Admirable, who was of a fairly affable nature, on being appealed to by the Bleaters, graciously consented to lend them his valuable aid. The climb, in the half light, might have tried some people's nerves, but the Admirable took it like a bird. With his brown, dare-devil face and supple figure, an artist might even have got some pleasure out of the sight. As to any risks to himself other than physical ones they never as much as entered his head. It was only old Phillpott's chimney he was blocking. Phillpott might rage a bit—probably would—but that was all

part of the entertainment. You will perceive that no one had taken into account the change into something new and strange that had come over Phillpott himself lately. With Malet and Curwen to back him up, however half-heartedly, he was not the same being.

When the owner of the study over which so much trouble was being taken ensconced himself at his table, intending to have a good go at Euripides, it must not be supposed that he neglected to lock his door, from choice. But the key having vanished he was helpless in the matter. So with maledictions on his fag, who from consistently letting his fire go out, had now made him up one big enough to roast an ox, he settled himself down, trusting to luck that his compatriots would leave him in peace for once.

Just as he had got fairly under way, a slight fumbling at his door handle attracted his attention. He ignored it for a minute, hoping that whoever it was would go away. On the sound being repeated, however, he gave an impatient, "Come in!"

Nobody complied with the invitation.

"Come in, whoever you are, and have done with it," he snapped.

A third repetition of the overture meeting with no response he strode wrathfully to the door, and tugged it open. Or rather he

tugged at it without attaining that result. And at the same minute that he realised that it was locked from outside, he became conscious that a dense mass of smoke was being driven into his room from the chimney, while his nostrils were assailed by the smell of burning wood from the door. He flew to the hearth and began to pick off the topmost pieces of burning coal with the tongs and throw them into the grate. By the time he had done this, the room was so full of smoke that you could have cut it with a knife. Getting back to the door he was just in time to see the red-hot end of what appeared to be a poker, effecting an entrance through one of the panels. This being withdrawn, some horrible compound, which in the dim, smoky atmosphere, and his own distracted state of mind he couldn't place, but which the initiated would have recognised as strips of brown paper dipped in brimstone and then set alight, appeared in the vacuum just made. The result was so abominable and offensive that for a minute the senior was appalled.

He stormed, he threatened, he implored. But the second appearance of the red-hot poker in another panel and a second repetition of the previous details, was all the result he obtained.

Part of the burning stuff fell on the floor. Phillpott trod it out with his foot. Then

some more fell. It was more difficult to put it out this time. The prisoner began to be seriously alarmed.

" You idiots! You've burnt a hole in the carpet!" he shrieked through the door.

" Then perhaps the chap who gets the study after you'll come in for a new one!" Giffard minor shouted back incautiously. Even in his half-choked condition, Phillpott rejoiced to have got hold of the identity of at least one of his tormentors.

" Let me out, you little fiends!" he spluttered. " You can't see across the room for the smoke, and I'm too choked to speak almost!"

" Well, that's something, anyway." The pious reflection was again Giffard minor's.

Phillpott's language, though unparliamentary, was enjoyed outside, to judge by the shrieks of laughter that followed each fresh outburst.

" Naughty! naughty!" said Giffard minor reprovingly, at the end of an onslaught that might have been described as vigorous, if it had not been so stifled. And the end of the poker again making its appearance, Phillpott realised that he had nothing to hope for from the tender mercies of his persecutors, but must find some way of escape on his own.

The door was out of the question. You

might as well have tried to knock down an oak-tree with a poker from a sixpence-halfpenny bazaar as to break it open with any weapon the study contained. The chimney was an unknown quantity, and in its present condition anything but an inviting one. As a means of escape the window was equally hopeless. But Phillpott took it, nevertheless. Perhaps the smoke had gone to his brain and made him a bit light-headed. But if you could have seen the object he looked when he landed on terra firma, with his face as black as a Christy Minstrel's, and his eyes as red round the rims as the present colour of the Doctor's mare, you would scarcely have wondered at him. At any rate, he didn't break any bones, although the bruises he achieved may have had something to do with the extreme lengths to which he went in the way of reprisals.

Meanwhile the Admirable, having conscientiously fixed the slate in the spot where it was likely to do the most damage, decided to swell the joyous crowd outside the study door, and with this purpose in his mind began his descent. He had slid down the roof, and was just letting himself down by his hands from the water spout, when he was collided into by a flying body which, when they had both picked themselves up, turned out to be Phillpott.

"So you're the chap who's been messing

about with my chimney?" cried the senior, making a grab at him. But as his fall had left him rather shaky on his legs the younger boy eluded his grasp with ease.

There wasn't much to be said in the Admirable's favour at any time. But with all his faults he wasn't the sort of fellow to leave his friends in the lurch. And while Phillpott was still prospecting for possible broken bones, he shot off like a rocket, and conveyed to the conspirators that he had fallen across Phillpott, and uttered the timely warning that in another minute the avenger would be upon them.

" Did he spot who you were?" they found time to ask, before scuttling off.

" I suppose so," answered the Admirable indifferently. " Who cares?"

When Phillpott, breathing vengeance that would have made your blood curdle to listen to, appeared upon the scene, the birds had flown.

But the key was on the outside of the door. Phillpott turned it and went in. It was a good thing he did, too, because the carpet was smouldering in several places, and in another minute or so would have been in actual flames. Phillpott put it out with the aid of his water-jug and then turned his attention to his own person. He managed to get a good many of the smuts off, before

going to plead his cause with the powers that be.

But if he had left his face in its original primeval grime, his mission would probably have been attended with greater success. He went first to Ogle as the head of the house.

CHAPTER XIII

AN APPEAL TO HEAD-QUARTERS

Now, Ogle was among the people who found nothing to grumble at in the present state of affairs. When life was going well with them, the haughty classics had a way of simply suffering him, that was hard to bear. But now that things were less flourishing, and they had begun to realise that they needed all the support they could get, they had slightly unbent. Nugent hadn't sneered at him for the space of three days: Farquhar had more than once addressed him on terms of something like equality: while Giffard had gone to the extreme length of letting him walk across the quad with him. Having made so much social progress, he was naturally anxious to do nothing that would jeopardise his growing position.

He didn't receive Phillpott with any enthusiasm. He wasn't exactly going to shunt his old cronies among the Moderns, of course. But now that he had made so many nice new friends on the other side, he might perhaps, in the future, have to keep them a little more at a distance.

"Locked you in, did they?" he repeated impatiently. "Well, why don't you take better care of your key, man? They don't lock me in!"

This was being unsympathetic, if you like. Added to his wrongs it drove Phillpott frantic.

"But the little beggars burnt holes in the door, too, I tell you!" he almost screamed, in his exasperation.

On receipt of this piece of information, Ogle looked rather glum. It might get the house into trouble with the authorities. "Well, you'll have to patch 'em up with putty, or something, so they don't show," he declared, as though Phillpott was the person to blame in the matter. "I can't think why you want to go making yourself such a howling nuisance in the house for, though. They don't burn holes in my door!"

Phillpott ceased to screech. "What are you going to do about it?" he asked with ominous calmness.

"Oh, I'll have to touch 'em up, I suppose," answered Ogle querulously. "Who did you say they were?"

"Well, I couldn't place the whole crew of them," said Phillpott regretfully. "In fact the Admirable, and that little sweep, Giffard minor, are the only two I'm dead certs about."

"Oh!" murmured Ogle perturbed. It was

like Phillpott's untactful way to have pitched on this particular pair. Giffard major had no sickly sentiment about his minor, of course. Still, it seemed to Ogle that any operations in that direction would be a poor beginning to the friendship between them, which that walk across the quad had seemed to promise. As to Crichton, though Nugent allowed himself a free hand there, he also repaid the younger boy's devotion by not letting anyone else touch him. And Nugent, from Ogle's point of view, was even more to be conciliated than Giffard. No, all things considered, the head of Yaeger's felt that Phillpott was asking too much of him.

"How can you possibly swear to them, you mule, when you were on the other side of the door?" he objected.

"Why——" Phillpott was beginning.

"Nobody could," said Ogle, cutting him short. "And if you jawed all day, I shouldn't believe you either. As for what the rest of the kids did to you, a fellow who's always pulling them up, like you are, must expect a few little treats of that kind."

"Then you won't do anything?" asked Phillpott.

"I'll do my prose—when I get a chance!" Ogle hinted broadly.

"Well, I shall go to the Captain," Phillpott threatened.

"And a lot of good you'll get out of that!" averred Ogle, with a penetration which was justified by events.

But Phillpott was in no mood to listen to reason, and two minutes afterwards was in Farquhar's study.

The latter gentleman was in a temper for which vile is a mild word. The Doctor's speeches took on an added edge, every time he thought them over. And the fact that he had let them pass, that he had stood up before the speaker as tongue-tied as a Bleater, made him hot even to think of. But once he got his innings, somebody should pay, he told himself furiously.

He wasn't very well pleased to see Phillpott. In the present rasped state of his feelings he wouldn't have been pleased to see his best friend. He wanted to be left alone, to think out ways and means of getting even with the enemy. And why Phillpott, who was merely a Yaeger and a Modern, and one too, who, unlike Ogle, he couldn't hope to make a tool of, should presume to thrust his undesired presence upon him at this particular time, he couldn't imagine.

"Well, what is it?" he asked ungraciously.

"It's this," said Phillpott, and proceeded to deliver his denunciation.

At another time it might have made the Captain sit up. But as the burning desire of

his life, at the present moment, was to get together a band of followers, he felt the same disinclination that Ogle had done, to put himself into certain people's bad graces at the start. Giffard minor wouldn't have mattered, of course. His major would have looked on all personal castigation, and rightly, too, as a means of grace. But with Nugent it was a different matter. As we know, the Captain had always foreborne to meddle with Nugent when he wasn't absolutely obliged to. It was only because, by some fortuitous chance, the new Doctor seemed to have set Nugent's back up equally with his own, that he felt justified on counting on him now. And Nugent, though he kicked his dog when he thought he required it, had a very marked disinclination to allow anyone else to adopt the same tactics. And Farquhar couldn't very well hammer young Giffard, without bestowing an equal amount of attention on his fellow culprit. No, assuredly Phillpott had come at a wrong time.

"Why don't you go to Ogle?" he snapped.

"I have been. He won't do anything," Phillpott told him.

"Well, that shows there isn't much in it," said Farquhar, although in his heart he must have known it didn't show anything of the kind. "I never knew such a chap for worrying as you are, Phillpott."

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Phillpott, in precisely the same words he had used before.

"I? Nothing!" said Farquhar crustily. "It's Ogle's show."

"Then that settles it!" declared Phillpott, with a world of meaning in the utterance if the Captain could but have read it.

"I'll settle you in another minute!" Farquhar was beginning. But he spoke to deaf ears. His guest had already departed.

Phillpott walked out of the Captain's study, across the quad, and straight to the Head-master's house. Could he see the Doctor, he asked.

Joseph didn't know. In saying so, he managed to convey that Phillpott had fallen considerably in his estimation by the request. But on its being suggested to him that he might find out, he grudgingly acquiesced.

He did find out. Yes, Master Phillpott might see the Doctor at once. Would he come this way, please. The little journey was as much like the Dead March in Saul as Joseph could make it.

Really, the study looked very cosy that evening. The bright fire gave quite a ruddy glow to the old oak panelling. And the Doctor in the depths of a big easy chair, with what seemed like a novel in his hand, and the gleam of a silver coffee service on a little

table at his side, couldn't well have looked more comfortable.

He mayn't have enjoyed being disturbed, any more than Farquhar and Ogle had done. But he differed from them in not showing it. Instead he welcomed Phillpott, as though he had been a friend. There was nothing stern about his face just now. It wore its pleasantest, most boyish expression.

"Sit down, Phillpott," he said. "Joseph, some fresh coffee."

"No, thank you, sir," answered Phillpott, refusing both invitations. Some people might have thought him rude. The Doctor didn't. But he put down his book, and gave the boy the whole of his attention.

"I have come to report two juniors, sir," said Phillpott. He brought out the sentence almost as though he was repeating a lesson. His grimy face, and red-rimmed eyes, made him look rather a comical object. But in spite of that the Doctor couldn't help feeling that he was assisting at something not unlike a tragedy.

"Couldn't the report have been made to me by the head of your house, Phillpott?" he asked.

"No, sir," answered Phillpott. He hadn't stirred since he entered the room. He hadn't moved a muscle of his face, except to open his mouth.

"Or the Captain of the school?" enquired the Doctor, further.

"No, sir," answered Phillpott.

The Doctor had to believe anyone who looked as much like a frozen image as that. "Very well, Phillpott," he said. "What have the youngsters been doing?"

"Sticking something on the top of my chimney, locking me in, boring holes with a red-hot poker through the door, putting abominable stuff in the holes, and then setting it alight, sir," answered Phillpott, like an automaton. You see, he was so choked up with indignation, that if he hadn't kept a desperate hold over himself, he might have burst.

"Then that accounts for your appearance," murmured the Head thoughtfully, with his eye on a particularly handsome smut on the extreme end of his visitor's nose.

"There are big holes in the door, sir. The room is about two inches deep in soot. The carpet is half burnt through," went on Phillpott in the same wooden jerks.

"You might spare me the more harrowing details, Phillpott," observed the Doctor. "Your first indictment was quite enough to go on with. Who are the culprits?"

"I don't know them all, sir," answered Phillpott. "But the Admirable—Crichton I mean, sir, and Giffard minor, were the two I recognised."

"How?" asked the Doctor.

"I met Crichton taking a header down the leads, sir. And Giffard minor called something—something rude, sir—through the key-hole," Phillpott informed him.

"Well, that seems fairly conclusive evidence," admitted the Doctor. "And as we can't have Crichton practising gymnastics on the roof, and as Giffard minor's manners certainly do seem in need of attention, I will see to the matter."

"Thank you, sir," said Phillpott. He half turned to go, then he came back.

"I'm a prefect, sir," he observed. "I'm not rounding on them—I'm reporting them!"

"I realise the distinction, Phillpott," the Doctor assured him. "Desperate cases require desperate remedies, of course. Perhaps if you had given yourself time to—shall we say wash the more obvious traces of the episode from your face? you might have chosen another way than this. But that will do now. Good-night!"

Phillpott hadn't been dismissed unkindly. He couldn't even feel that the Doctor blamed him for what he had done. But he couldn't feel that he admired him for it, either. And that about washing his face was a nasty one, too. He went and looked at himself in the glass when he got back. And what he saw there, didn't help to soothe his feelings.

After second lesson that day the Doctor asked Ogle to stay behind. He didn't detain him two minutes. The affair wasn't so very serious, after all. In his way of looking at certain things, the Doctor's perspective seemed singularly like the boys' own.

"A report has been made to me, Ogle, by one of the prefects of your house—Phillpott," he said. "I have my own ideas, of course, as to why he came to me, instead of to you, in the first instance, but for this time, at least, I am going to respect his reticence. He declares that a party of juniors, amongst whom he recognised Crichton and Giffard minor, stopped up his chimney, locked him into his study, bored holes through his door with a red-hot poker, filled them with a mixture, at whose ingredients I might perhaps guess"—was there a reminiscential twinkle in the speaker's eye?—"and set it alight. Now, this sort of thing is not to be allowed to go on, of course. The destruction of the school property is quite an important item in the business, to say nothing of the risk to life and limb involved in Crichton's jaunt to the chimney. The matron will help you to arrange about the stoppage of pocket-money, until some part, at least, of the damage has been made good. But the matter of the disrespect shown to one of your own body I leave in your hands, as head of

the house in which the outrage occurred. But it must be a real punishment, mind. You must take a firm grip of the oars—or of whatever other instrument may occur to you. Both Crichton and Giffard must be made to feel that they cannot be permitted to behave in that way to a prefect with impunity."

With that he dismissed Ogle, who, burning with rage against Phillpott, made straight for the senior common-room. When he told its occupants what had happened they could hardly believe their ears.

"Go and fetch him, Giffard, there's a good chap," said Farquhar, looking like a thunder-cloud.

Phillpott expected to be fetched. He had not kept away from the common-room with any idea of skulking out of the business. But he didn't want to meet the others until they had realised what he had done. He gathered from their attitude on entering that they realised it very thoroughly and held strong views on the subject. From the grim way in which they ringed round him, indeed, it might almost have been a fight, for which he had been summoned.

"Ogle says you've been to Mr. Fitz-Herbert and sneaked about the Admirable and Giffard minor," Farquhar began at him in a sulphurous sort of way. "Have you? It's rather a sweat to believe such a thing

even of a Modern, so I'm asking you straight out, before we do anything."

This was a mistake, of course. The Moderns didn't approve of what Phillpott had done, any more than Farquhar did. But they had begun to realise lately that they didn't exist at St. Osyth's merely to be kicked, and they didn't relish Farquhar's way of putting it.

Phillpott looked more like a crabbed bulldog than ever, as he stood up to them. "The little ruffians might have set the room on fire, and me in it," he declared roundly. "I sang out to them that the carpet was getting like tinder, but they wouldn't take any notice. And I might have broken every bone in my body, doing a header, like I had to, through the window."

"Bother your beastly bones!" retorted the Captain unsympathetically. "We haven't got you here to talk about your silly little crocks. Did you sneak on the kids to Mr. FitzHerbert? That's what we want to know."

"I reported them to him," Phillpott corrected.

"Why on earth didn't you report them to Ogle, or Farquhar, if you couldn't manage the little beggars yourself?" put in Hythe, looking at Phillpott in much the same sort of way as the others were looking. As this way

was as though he was a worm, Phillpott naturally didn't like it.

"So I did," he protested. "I went to them both. But they wouldn't do anything. Nobody ever will do anything in this rotten show. And I'd a perfect right to report them, so there!" This was news to most people. The Captain and Ogle were the recipients of some puzzled glances.

"Why didn't you take them on, Farquhar?" asked Samborne pacifically.

Farquhar couldn't very well reply—"Because if I had, Nugent might have got the pip, and I wanted him on my side." So he said, "Oh, because, I'd had about enough of Phillpott. He's always kicking up rows about something. Besides, how could I guess he was going to serve us like this?"

"Well, what could I do?" asked Phillpott, beginning to find the weight of public opinion rather oppressive.

"You could have come to me," Giffard told him wrathfully. "I'd have settled my minor for you with a slipper, or a hair-brush, and enjoyed the job! But to go to Mr. Fitz-Herbert!"

"I opinion, that for once in your life, someone did seem pleased to see you!" remarked Gegechkory gratuitously.

"Then you opinion wrong!" snapped

Phillpott, turning upon him. "He seemed to wish me further, if you ask me!"

"Piffle!" retorted Spratt, and though it sounded like an indirect compliment it wasn't meant as such. "You've given the beggar the chance of his life. What did he say to you, exactly, Ogle?"

Ogle considered. "That it must be a real punishment, mind! Those-are-my-orders sort of thing!" he gave out at last.

"Ugh! you brute!" exclaimed Farquhar, meaning Phillpott. "You Moderns make me sick, with your crawling ways. See where you've landed us, now!"

Again it was the wrong note. "We didn't know what he was going to do. And I'm not so sure I'd have stopped it if I had known!" observed Malet instantly.

"It's only because Phillpott's a Modern that you wouldn't take the thing up," added Curwen. "If it had happened to one of your own seniors, you'd have had the kids bending over before they knew where they were. And I'm jolly glad he did go, if you want to know. And if the new Doctor's the sort of chap who can change things here, nobody'll be better pleased than me!"

"Well, any change in you would be for the better!" Nugent told him distastefully. "The question is, what are we going to do?"

Farquhar had been thinking. His words

came out now deliberately. It was as though he had freed himself from all his old restraints.

"He's no right to order a prefect to punish the kids at all," he declared. "It's unconstitutional. He ought either to take them in hand himself, or leave us to do it on our own. What would the chaps think of us, do you suppose, if they knew that every time they got a whopping or lines from us, it was just Doctor's orders? It's because they know we do it off our own bat that they stand it, half the time. The minute a master comes into the business, it's another pair of shoes altogether. But Mr. FitzHerbert's little game has been as plain as a pikestaff, all along. He wants to boss the show himself. The prefects are to ferret out things about the juniors and report them. Then he'll chalk down exactly how things are to be made warm for the unlucky little beggars, and leave us to do it. Phillpott, by this caddish trick of his, has played into his hands beautifully. But I'll be hanged if I'll be Georgy's policeman. And if Ogle's the chap I take him for, he'll say he's not taking any either, and tell him to do his own work!"

"Hear, hear!" said a good many voices at the end of this spirited harangue. But to look at, Ogle didn't seem as though he was quite fitted to pull stroke in so mighty an

enterprise. The smirk of satisfaction on his weak mouth at Farquhar's flattery was contradicted by the look of abject terror which came into his pale eyes at the possible consequences.

"Won't there be awful ructions if I say all that?" he asked uncertainly.

"You never can tell!" answered Nugent, in the words of a well-known character. "St. George is such a rum brute. He might fall on your neck, or then again he might hit out—even as Balaam smote the ass!"

The touch of venom in the remark may be put down to the fact that the speaker had that morning given the mare her first ablutions, and that the combined smell of paint and turpentine was still making him sick. Nobody had questioned him directly about the matter—or at least they hadn't done so twice. But he fancied he caught a snigger on every face that was turned on him.

And the number of fellows who happened to be hanging about the stable-door, when he made his appearance there laden like a housemaid, with cleaning utensils, would have astonished you. He had availed himself of the key, of course. But though this gave him a much-needed privacy, it also prevented him from spotting the individual who chose that moment to warble outside the dulcet strains

of a song beginning "My love is like a red, red rose."

The thing had got on his nerves already. He perceived covert insults in the way people breathed almost. He even fancied an artless allusion to the Red Sea, made in his hearing, to be a direct reference to his own personal misfortunes. And a small fag being sent quite innocently by his master to borrow his red ink for mapping purposes, received a box on the ear which sent him spinning from one side of the room to the other.

Thus it will be perceived that Nugent was in no mood to deliver Ogle from the hands of the Philistines, even had he wanted to. Besides, the head of Yaeger's had never been a friend of his, and if he chose to beard the lion in his den, in the way Farquhar was suggesting, it was distinctly his own affair. That in the result of his doing so, the author of his present humiliations was scarcely likely to derive any delirious pleasure from the episode, was all so much to the good, of course.

But for once in a way, Farquhar showed something of the wisdom of the serpent. That is to say he tucked his arm confidentially into Ogle's, thus affording a public exhibition of the closeness of their friendship.

"Ructions?" he repeated carelessly.

"Well, what if there are? It's only St. George. He can't eat you. He's gone beyond his rights in what he's ordered you to do. Well, all you've got to do is to tell him so."

"You needn't put it like that, though," said Hythe, with an impulse of pity.

But with Farquhar's hand still in his arm, as an outward and visible sign of the social heights to which he had attained, Ogle rather resented such familiarities from a person like Scissors. He ostentatiously ignored the remark, and turned again to hang on Farquhar's every utterance.

"Don't be *violent*, you know," advised his mentor, with perhaps some latent idea of humour in his mind. "Just tell him he's going beyond his rights"—he repeated the phrase rather viciously for Hythe's benefit—"in telling you to punish the kids. Refuse gently, but firmly, and we shall all think you no end of a chap."

Despite this pleasing prospect Ogle looked miserably undecided. "Suppose he doesn't ask me if I've done it, I can lie low, can't I?" he asked, like a drowning man catching at a straw.

"Oh, he'll ask you right enough," returned Nugent, who, of them all, seemed to have come to a singularly accurate understanding of the new Doctor's character.

"Well, that'll make a splendid opening for you, won't it?" suggested Spratt persuasively.

In after life Spratt would probably write novels. The little dramas of life interested him so acutely. And this latest one promised some feverish developments.

CHAPTER XIV

WAR TO THE KNIFE

There have been happier boys in the world than Ogle, in the interval that elapsed between the Doctor's telling him what to do, and asking him if he had done it. But the apple of success, as represented by his intimacy with Farquhar, and other exalted members of St. Osyth's, which had long been the object of his ambition, seemed now within his grasp.

What a pity it was, though, that the price he had to pay for it should be so high! For, in spite of all Farquhar's plausible assertions to the contrary, Ogle wasn't quite a fool, and realised that whatever shortcomings Mr. Fitz-Herbert might possess, indifference as to whether his orders were carried out or not did not rank amongst them.

During the Greek lesson the next morning, he followed the text with blind eyes. It was lucky that the Doctor didn't put him on to construe, as he certainly would not have been able to find the place. Most of the time he kept repeating Farquhar's phrases over and over to himself, as though he was repeating a lesson.

After he had given the signal for dismissal the Doctor detained him, as he had done on the previous day. Ogle had felt it in his bones that he would. Indeed, up to a certain point, he had that curious feeling that comes to us all at times, as though he had passed through precisely the same experience at a previous stage of his existence.

"I may conclude, Ogle, that you have followed my instructions in the matter of the two juniors I spoke to you about yesterday?"

The Doctor's tone was quite casual. Ogle wished he wouldn't take it so much for granted that he had only to speak to be obeyed. It made things so much harder for the person who had failed to take this peculiarity of his into account.

"No, sir," he muttered.

"And why?" asked the Doctor. His voice had ceased to be casual.

Ogle couldn't be said to brace himself, because he was standing straight up before the Doctor, with nothing to catch hold of, and he hadn't enough stamina in the whole of his composition to do it morally. All he could do was to make it clear that, while his present action might appear informal, he wasn't acting solely on his own initiative.

"The prefects and I, sir, thought we would rather you took them in hand yourself," he stammered.

"I wasn't aware that I had given the prefects and you any choice in the matter, Ogle. But I will allow you to explain yourself," observed the Doctor frostily.

Why had Farquhar told him it would be easy, Ogle wondered miserably? The Doctor hadn't uttered more than half a dozen sentences, but he was beginning to dread the sound of his clear, incisive voice. It was to stop it, as much as anything else, that made him plunge into the explanations the Doctor seemed to wish for.

"The prefects and I, sir, think you ought to do the work yourself, or let us do it on our own," he quoted almost verbatim, in his agitation. "We think you're going beyond your rights—that was what they said, sir," he murmured hurriedly, observing the Doctor's expression—"in ordering us to do anything at all—of that kind, I mean, sir," he added still more hurriedly. "They think a licking wouldn't do a junior any good, if he thought it came from you, sir."

Having followed his instructions with an exemplary faithfulness Ogle stood and shivered. He didn't feel that he had been through this part of the experience before, though. It didn't seem possible that anyone who had been under fire to this extent at any stage of his existence could have survived the episode.

"Your views are certainly striking, Ogle," said the Doctor at last, and his voice made the air seem cold. "In fact, they have struck me so forcibly that I think we may safely conclude that a boy capable of propounding them—while at the same time sheltering himself behind his colleagues—is scarcely fitted to be either a prefect or the head of a house. Consider yourself, therefore, degraded from these posts from to-day. And now, fetch the Captain and the rest of the prefects in, at once, to me, here."

"You're all to go back to the class-room," said Ogle, hurrying after the departing seniors. The interview had lasted such a short time that he had scarcely any difficulty in catching them up. His face was like chalk.

"What did he say to you?" asked Farquhar. Could it actually be that there was a shade of anxiety in those strident tones?

"Oh, not much. You said he wouldn't, you know," returned Ogle, bitterly. "Only, that if I could stick him out in all the rotten things you told me to say, I'm not fit to be a prefect, or the head of Yaeger's, and will I kindly consider myself hoofed out!"

"Phew!" whistled Farquhar. Mr. Fitz-Herbert seemed to have got in his counter-stroke rather promptly.

"Anyway, he wants you, now—you, and

the rest of the prefects," said Ogle with a vindictive satisfaction in conveying the mandate.

He hadn't really realised things yet, and he turned back to the class-room with the others as a matter of course. But after they had entered, and Mr. FitzHerbert with a little gesture of his hand had motioned them to stand in front of him, his memory was quickened.

"I said the prefects, Ogle," the Doctor reminded him, in a voice that was quite unthawed. A dark flush came over Ogle's white face. Then he turned and left the room drearily.

The new Doctor gazed at the group of big, defiant fellows in front of him, and knew that the decisive moment in the struggle between them had come. Some people, looking at him as he stood there, might have thought that he was too young and highly-strung to manage such a crew single-handed. Perhaps the latter thought so, too.

"Ogle has just informed me, gentlemen," he began in a steady almost expressionless way, "that he refuses to punish two juniors, about whom I gave him instructions yesterday. He has cited you as his supporters, in what I cannot but consider as an act of direct defiance."

Perhaps Farquhar had not counted on

Ogle's being quite so diffuse in his information as this. But, all the same, he lifted his hot, mutinous face to give an emphatic assent, when the Doctor stopped him.

"Not yet, Farquhar!" he said. "I have some things to say to you, that I want you to consider very seriously, before you speak. The juniors were reported to me for an act of disrespect, by one of your own body. Why he made his report to me, instead of to you, he knows best himself; he has not informed me, I have not enquired. He was certainly within his rights in doing what he has done, as I should have been within my rights"—he eyed the assembled young gentlemen very straightly here—"in punishing them in any way I thought fit. But because the report was made to me, in what I must still consider a rather unusual way, I thought it better and likelier to inspire the youngsters concerned with a greater idea of your prerogative if the head of the house in which the outbreak occurred should take that part of the business upon himself. Do not think for one minute that I am justifying my action to you. You must always accept my authority as final on any matter, as you will always have to take my judgment on trust. But because I am anxious for us to start with a fair and friendly spirit on both sides, I have thought it kinder to you, in this one case, to

explain my attitude. You, very rightly and properly, set a high value on your—we will not use the word rights—say, rather, your uses and powers as monitors here. Believe me, I set the same value, and in this instance have acted entirely in your interests."

What set, unresponsive faces the speaker had to confront! Still, as he looked at them his tone got more friendly.

"Thus," he continued, "when Ogle, instead of being grateful for this consideration of mine, chose to defy me, in some remarkable phrases which I think he will not repeat, giving you as his authority for the same, I couldn't help being reminded of"—the Doctor's gaze swept the listening faces and his blue eyes lightened up with a whimsical flash—"of the Irishman who was so anxious to pick a quarrel that he said someone was treading on the tail of his coat!"

Just for a moment it almost seemed as though the golden voice, with its irrepressible suggestion of brogue in the quotation and the sudden unguarded change of manner, would win them. He did get an unmistakable lightening of the atmosphere, too. One or two smiled back involuntarily. Curwen laughed.

But the Doctor's quick, sunny flash of words and looks subsided almost as quickly as it came. And his voice was very weighty as he said:

"Now, gentlemen, that is a foolish attitude. And it is as much for his folly in holding it as for his disobedience to my orders that I consider Ogle unfitted for the positions of trust which he has hitherto held. But the duty he neglected devolves upon you. I now make it a prefects' matter. Farquhar, as head prefect, I leave the punishment of Crichton and Giffard minor in your hands. You will come to me at this time to-morrow and tell me my orders have been carried out."

Farquhar, during the whole of this speech had been getting more and more enraged. That little weakening of his followers, when it had almost seemed as though they were going over bodily to the Doctor's side, had alarmed him. If Mr. FitzHerbert was going to get over them as easily as that, by just talking to them, what in the world was going to happen to St. Osyth's, when he himself was no longer there to guide its destinies? So he pressed a little way forward from the rest, his face very red and important.

"Well, sir——" he was beginning. But the sentence was never finished.

"Be silent, sir!" You couldn't say that the Doctor had thundered it at him, because he hadn't raised his voice. But that was the effect. The lightning speech shut Farquhar up, while an electric thrill went through the room. "I have just degraded Ogle for daring

to defy me. Be very sure I shall not be more lenient in your case. I want to hear no further word from you until you come to me to-morrow to say you have recovered your senses in the matter. If any innate right feeling you may possess should at the same time dictate an apology, I shall be ready to accept it. And now, gentlemen, you may go!"

They went, and it was noticeable that the busy, bustling, ceaseless chattering which usually attended their progress was absent. They walked in almost absolute silence, and they all made for the same place. There was no need for Farquhar to tell them that a counsel of war was imperative. It was either a case of accepting the Doctor's dictum, or war to the knife. In the ensuing debate it was noticeable, too, how curt and to the point their utterances became. This was no ordinary school row that could be discussed at leisure. It was the turning point in St. Osyth's history. The issues, whichever way they turned, were bound to be momentous. From that moment they ceased to regard the Doctor as a nonentity. It seemed almost laughable that they had ever done so. From henceforward he was a person—the person one had almost said—with whom they had to reckon.

"Well," said Farquhar. "I'll be shot if I

give in. I wouldn't touch the kids, even with a ruler, after that. I suppose the rest of you chaps are with me?"

"I am, of course, if you really are going on with the thing!" said Giffard, though without much enthusiasm.

"I suppose I shall have to be, too," said Berkeley. In his case the fervour was even less marked.

"In my country," said Gegechkory, "we should keel a man for dictating like that." He pronounced it like the foundation of a boat, but no one was in the least doubt as to his meaning. "Thus, I am on!"

"You, too, Noad?" asked Farquhar negligently.

Noad wasn't so ready with his assent as usual. "Mr. FitzHerbert seems rather a terror, doesn't he?" he said at last. "Don't you think you could manage to tone it down a bit, when you tell him, Farquhar?"

"Not if I know it!" returned Farquhar. "You've to go all the way with that sort. But we shall only pull it off by sticking together. He could down us, like he's done Ogle"—he glanced at a moody figure gazing out of the window with its back to the room, whose shoulders jerked angrily at the allusion—"if we went for him single-handed. But against the lot of us he's a gone coon."

This was new language from Farquhar.

And his way of seeming to regard them as though they were the brightest jewels in his crown would take his colleagues some time to get used to.

Samborne now made his voice heard. "The beggar seemed to make one think his way while he was jawing," he observed. "But if you chaps are all agreed that he wants to do us in the eye, I suppose you know best. But what a beastly stopper it all is on the games!"

"Go ahead, old chap," said Spratt with an encouraging nod in the Captain's direction, "And count me in, whatever happens. I wouldn't miss being in at the death for anything." But he didn't say whose death. Spratt always had had a good level head of his own.

Nugent hadn't spoken. Farquhar had looked at him once or twice enquiringly. "What do you say, Nugent?" he asked now, almost deferentially for him.

Nugent gave a contemptuous shrug. The jar of turpentine, the scrubbing-brushes, and Bates' jeering face, were all awaiting him at his place of punishment. The mare was now a chaste strawberry colour as the result of his efforts. And Bates had many outwardly respectful, but inwardly satirical comments to make on the subject, such as: "Looks a bit less like having the scarlet fever than she did,

sir. Perhaps in another week or so you'll have got the second layer off, if so be as you put plenty of elbow-grease to it." Ugh! If Bates survived the mare's recovery without a broken head, it would be a wonder.

"My good man, St. George means to come out top, whatever happens," Nugent averred now. "But if you think any little effort on your part will delay his getting there, for goodness' sake make it. I'll back you up in anything you like to do."

The Moderns had not yet uttered a word. Hythe hadn't either. But was it within the bounds of human possibility, considering what an insignificant member of the community they had always thought him, that both Farquhar and Nugent were looking in his direction, Farquhar with something not unlike anxiety, and Nugent with faint curiosity.

"Going to make things hum, as usual, Scissors?" asked Nugent languidly at last.

"There's no need!" said Hythe with truth. "But I wish you chaps wouldn't. Mr. Fitz-Herbert talked solid horse sense just now, you know. And it really was rather decent of him, giving the prefects a look-in, after Phillpott had gone back on us like that. Oh, yes, that's what I call it, Phillpott. And you can't say the young 'uns don't deserve a licking, if ever anybody did!"

"That's all rubbish about its being decent of him," said Farquhar almost querulously. "If Nugent and the rest of the chaps here all say that he did it to score off us, why can't you, I should like to know!"

"Perhaps they're bigger liars than I am," Hythe suggested with a grin.

"Does that mean you won't come in with us?" asked Farquhar, biting his lip.

"How can I?" Hythe answered more seriously. "I can't say St. George is a tyrant"—he gave the word a pronunciation they all knew—"when I think he's only been trying to do a square deal."

"I suppose you wouldn't call yourself afraid of him?" sneered Nugent.

"Oh, yes, I should," Hythe told him with imperturbable candour, "if I'd got to jam down his throat all the blither Farquhar's trying to persuade you into."

"Oh, well, we can do without you!" declared Farquhar, his nose as much in the air as its somewhat Roman construction would allow.

"That's all right, then," said Hythe comfortably.

"Always traitor!" breathed Gegechkory.

Hythe didn't say anything. But he made a negligent motion with his hand which caused Gegechkory to subside with startling suddenness. It may have reminded him of

certain experiences of his on the night when Hythe had been his guest.

Still the Moderns hadn't spoken. Farquhar only wished they would. At last he was forced to take the initiative himself.

"Are you chaps going to join in with us?" he asked with a fine show of indifference.

"I don't see why we should," answered Malet rather sullenly.

"Times are rather changed, aren't they?" remarked Curwen with his brutal directness.

"Last time it was 'Please, Farquhar, may we join?' from Ogle, and 'I suppose you must!' from you. Well, you've bowled Ogle out between you, but he's only got himself to thank for it, and I'm not sorry, for one. You chaps have always tried to sit on us. Now that St. George seems on the same lay with you, you can see how you like it!"

"Hear! Hear!" said Phillpott.

"What have *you* got to shout about?" asked Farquhar, turning on him with sudden ferocity. "We wouldn't have you with us at a gift. A fellow who's brought all this upon us!"

It was wonderful how unanimous they all were in accepting the seriousness of the situation. Up till yesterday, Farquhar wouldn't have believed that anything Mr. FitzHerbert could do would make him turn a hair. Now he reproached Phillpott for

bringing "all this" upon them without seeing anything out of the way in the words.

They were talking and wrangling for some time about that. No one was wildly enthusiastic but with the exception of Hythe and Curwen no one actually refused to join forces with Frothingham.

"Very well," said a gentleman grandly. "Since we are all agreed--he ignored the two dissentients--"I shall leave the kids alone. And if the beast asks us about it to-morrow, I shall tell him to do his own work, and leave us to do ours!"

"I says to myself, says I," murmured Spratt beatifically. But as he merely chuckled in his inside, without giving the rest the benefit of his reflections, one could have imagined a more useful member of the community.

CHAPTER XV

CAVING IN

Mr. FitzHerbert might be as deficient as Farquhar said he was. But in the little matter of self-control he might have compared favourably with the lords of the Sixth. For instance, throughout the whole of the Greek lesson next morning you couldn't have gathered by any fluctuation in his voice, or even by so much as an extra flicker of his eyelids that anything out of the way was taking place. One could not if one would, have said as much for the young gentlemen who were technically supposed to be sitting at his feet. Farquhar's parade of self-possession was almost grotesque, while you could have hung a button-hook on Nugent's scornful lip. Gegechkory's eyes were so many points of light, while Giffard's face was so wooden that it might have belonged to the prow of a ship. Hythe looked wretched. Curwen was drawing a portrait of the Doctor on his blotting-pad with an openess which robbed the act of any possibility of set offence. Ogle sat shrunk up. He was doing all he knew not to catch the Doctor's eye. The rest

appeared humpy, or nervous or simply self-conscious, according to their several temperaments.

But the Doctor went on unmoved. Only he seemed to be doing a good deal of the work himself this morning, as a less agitated set of pupils might have noticed. This was fortunate, as with so much to occupy their minds the previous evening, their preparation had been of the sketchiest.

The lesson was over at last. But the Doctor didn't give the signal for dismissal. Instead he closed his book, and looked quietly, easily, composedly, round on them all.

"Well, Farquhar?" he said.

Farquhar was sitting down. But the question somehow brought him sharply to his feet. He thrust his hands deep down in his pockets and gave the Head back his look—or tried to.

"We're still of the same opinion, sir," he said.

"And that is?" asked the Doctor.

Farquhar would have been just as well pleased not to have put it into words. But there was that in the question that made the response imperative.

"That we refuse to punish the juniors at your orders, sir!"

"You have put it quite plainly, Farquhar," the Doctor told him in the breathless pause

which followed. Was it only yesterday that he had made that friendly, almost joking reference, to the touchy individual who fancied liberties were being taken with his garments? That any lightness or even friendliness would ever again come their way from the inexorable law-giver, who was looking at them all as though they were small objects a long way off, hardly seemed possible. But in this new mood, Mr. FitzHerbert certainly commanded their attention if he did nothing else. Not a word, not a syllable, not the smallest tightening of his mouth or pucker of his brow escaped them.

"Am I to conclude that you are speaking in your own name or in that of the prefects as a body?" he asked, and simple as the question was, it seemed to invest the situation with an uncomfortable gravity.

"For all who count, sir," answered Farquhar, after hesitating a minute.

"Allow me to be the judge of that," said the Head calmly. "Are there any amongst you, gentlemen, who are not in agreement with Farquhar's sentiments?"

Hythe got to his feet. His face was set like a flint, but his eyes looked as though he was being hurt.

"I think the prefects ought to take the juniors on, sir, but I'm with them—in—in what it's going to be," he brought out.

"Very well, Hythe," the Doctor agreed impassively.

Curwen rose next, "I don't hold with what the prefects are doing either, sir," he said. "and I'm not with them—in what it's going to be."

This repetition of Hythe's phrase, which Curwen had used because he couldn't think of anything else, sounded ominous.

"Very well, Curwen," said the doctor as before.

Phillpott got up a little uncertainly. He looked a shade more subdued than usual, too. How could anyone possibly have perceived that all this could have arisen from that hot-tempered, unpremeditated act of his.

"Me, too, sir!" he said, quite meekly for him.

The Doctor nodded ever so slightly in his direction. And when Phillpott sat down it was with the aggrieved feeling that he hadn't thought him worth even the short answer he had accorded to the other two.

"I suppose I am right in concluding that the threat of expulsion would not move you from your decision, Farquhar?" asked the Doctor next.

The cold, dispassionate question didn't find Farquhar altogether unprepared. He hadn't let things get to this pass without taking such a contingency into review. Expul-

sion was the unassailable argument which a head-master could always bring forward on occasions like the present, and which gave him such an unfair pull over his opponents. Farquhar would rather not be expelled, of course. But he was going away at the end of the term, in any case, for that three months' visit to India. At the end of that time he was fixed up for Sandhurst. His people might not receive the news with any pleasurable emotion, but the joy of seeing him again after so long an absence would surely be enough to make them willing to overlook a little social mishap of this kind. So that he quite realised what he was about in answering:

"No, sir!"

"So I supposed!" said the Doctor. "Consideration for your family or your good name would weigh nothing against having to own yourself in the wrong."

His voice seemed to put Farquhar aside as a person not to be considered. He turned to the others, and not one amongst them but would have sworn that he was directing his remarks to him alone.

"Now, gentlemen"—the words fell with a steely sound—"you have chosen to defy me. You have also in the person of your spokesman been quite unallowably disrespectful. Yesterday I was anxious to spare you. To-

day I realise that this is not a case for consideration. Yesterday I would have accepted your apology. To-day I exact it. And it shall be as public as your offence has been. After second lesson to-morrow I shall assemble the whole school in hall to hear you admit that you have done my bidding in the matter, and to listen to such expressions of your regret as I shall consider fitting."

They weren't on their feet, because the traditions of school life held. But surprise and rage and mutinous resolve surged round their ranks like a wave. Farquhar had gone absolutely livid. Then he jumped to his feet, every barrier of restraint gone.

"No, sir, we——" he was beginning.

"Hush, Farquhar!" said the Doctor. He had silenced the boy yesterday by that lightning charge of his. He silenced him now by that one grave utterance. The excitement in the room did not die down, but it became stiller. How quiet the listening faces were! And how rigid!

"Don't make any more wild, silly statements of that kind, Farquhar," said the Doctor almost sadly. "It will only make the coming down harder for you. You will do exactly what I have set you. I should scarcely have said as much as I have unless I was very sure of my ground. You yourself have urged that I take the punishment of the

juniors upon myself. In the event of your persisting in your refusal I shall most certainly do so. And my punishment will be expulsion!"

"But——" Nugent was half out of his seat.

That slight gesture of the Doctor's hand stopped the words on his lip. "That is my ultimatum, gentlemen," he told them uncompromisingly. "You have between now and to-morrow morning in which to make your decision. I decline to discuss the matter further with you till then. And now dismiss."

On going out, Phillpott managed to get beside Hythe, and kept pace with him almost humbly.

"I say," he said after a minute. "If the kids had smoked you out like that and you couldn't get anyone to take the thing up, what should you have done?"

"Hammered 'em!" answered Hythe concisely.

"Weil, I didn't mean to bring this on the little beggars, of course," observed Phillpott after a minute.

Hythe looked down at him. "Why, you don't suppose——" he was beginning and then stopped and laughed. "Don't you worry, old chap. They won't get any more than they deserve," he observed with apparent heartlessness.

Up till now the young gentlemen of the Sixth had been so occupied with the affair as it affected themselves that not one of them, not even Giffard major, had given more than a passing thought to the heroes of the exploit. They gave a lot of thought to them now, though. And it was noticeable that they didn't seek the common-room in a body as they had done on a previous occasion. Farquhar went off moodily to his own study. Nugent did the same, and when Berkeley suggested that Giffard should come and talk it over with him the latter with a "Can't, I'm busy!" turned moodily on his heel.

One is not to suppose, of course, that though their superiors had been oblivious of any feelings the juniors might have on the subject, that the latter had been entirely without them. Of course, after Phillpott's recognition of them, neither Crichton nor Giffard minor had expected to get off scot free. Still, they were both cane-hardened souls, and a licking more or less would not have made any great odds to either of them.

To their wonder they heard nothing either from Ogle or the Captain the first day. And not being sufficiently up in the secret history of St. Osyth's to understand why they were escaping their just deserts, they were no little astonished. Afterwards, when the news filtered down—old Joseph as usual being the

medium of communication—that they themselves had become a *casus belli* between the prefects and the Doctor—that was the order in which they put the two at this stage of the proceedings—they naturally became insufferably self-important.

The agreeable deadlock between the two heads of society seemed likely to end in their coming out of the business without any worse effect than a swollen head each. Crichton, always admired by the Middle School, now became its idol. Giffard minor occupied the same gratifying position with regard to the Bleaters, and in consequence put on an amount of side for which in calmer moments they would have kicked him. He dropped all fagging as beneath him, and his owner was too much occupied himself just now to go to the trouble of routing him out; in passing inoffensive Bleaters he snatched at their caps and pitched them over the nearest wall; he smoked innocuous but evil-smelling cigarettes made out of tea and brown paper almost under the very noses of the seniors; he was unbelievably enterprising in class, giving “lumps” as the plural of sugar and translating *œuf* as money, under the impression that M. Gelot, as he explained to that gentleman, had said “oof.” But the end was at hand.

“Your major wants you,” said a school-

house junior, running up to him with the message about half an hour after the gentleman in question had assisted at the interview with the Doctor.

"Like his cheek!" said his minor, adding rather soberly, "Are you sure?" Giffard the elder was not accustomed to feel any violent need for the society of this young brother of his, and would hardly have evoked his presence gratuitously without some urgent reason.

"Perhaps the prefects are going to spank you, turn and turn about, and they've let him have the first shot as he's your brother," said someone, as though Giffard major had been accorded a privilege.

Having aimed a random blow in the speaker's direction, Giffard minor, slightly sobered in spirits, set out for his brother's study. After all, he thought hopefully, it might only be a letter from home. His mother had said something in her last letter about the promise of a bull-pup which, in the event of receiving she intended, with a self-sacrifice of which only she could have been capable of, to hand over to her youngest home. The mere thought of getting news on such an exhilarating subject quickened the little boy's steps.

His major was writing when he entered and didn't look up, although he must have



"He lifted his hand for a cuff."

heard him come in. But when he did raise his face at last the expression nearly gave Giffard a fit.

"Well, you've done it this time, you young scamp!" growled the elder. "You're to be bunked!"

"Bunked! I don't believe it!" cried Giffard minor, going rather white about the gills nevertheless.

"Oh, don't you?" asked his brother, glad to find something he could fall foul upon in the answer. "Then take that!" He lifted his hand for a cuff, which if it had come off would have made the little boy's ears tingle to a pretty tune. But he let it fall again without striking.

"Is it for—the brimstone an' that, Dick?" In the sore trouble the little boy slipped back into the home name.

"Yes, and for cheeking monitors, and crocking up the school property, and for making such a sickening little idiot of yourself that the place is glad to be rid of you," said the elder sourly. To get all these little courtesies off his chest appeared to afford him some relief.

"But I can't be bunked, Dick," protested his junior wildly. "Can't you do anything?"

"No, I can't, and I wouldn't if I could," answered the elder brother, knowing all the

time that this was not correct, and that he was going to do something very soon.

"What will they say at home, though, Dick?" asked the youngster with a suspicious tremble in his voice. Who could ever have supposed that so great a brave could have got as near to tears as this.

"You should have thought of that before!" retorted his senior crustily.

The little boy swung his foot aimlessly to and fro for a minute. "Mother was going to give me that bull-pup Colonel Guerin promised her," he said, almost to himself.

It sounded as though he was afraid that in the light of present events the offering would be withheld. But the elder boy understood him right enough. A mother who could give away a bull-pup that she might have kept for herself, wasn't the sort of mother to—well have her offspring returned on her hands in quite that way.

"Here, get out of my study, you snivelling little ass!" stormed his elder, for only answer, however.

Considering that it was by his own request that the little boy had sought the shelter of his most inhospitable walls in the first instance, the injunction was to say the least of it unjust. But that Giffard major's bark was worse than his bite may be gathered from the fact that he followed the little boy from the

study and that the trend of his steps lay towards the Captain's study.

Unlike Giffard major, Nugent did not make any claim on his juniors' company. It would certainly have been contrary to his usual practice to have done so in the case of the Admirable, since most of his advances in that young gentleman's direction were with the express purpose of shovelling him off. He hoped the younger boy wouldn't come to-day. But he knew he would, all the same.

Not so very long after the Doctor had delivered that ultimatum of his, there came a knock at Nugent's study door which he recognised, although the jauntiness seemed to have gone out of it somehow.

"What do you want? I'm busy!" Nugent called out ungraciously.

"Please, Nugent, do let me come in," the Admirable called back.

"All right then," said Nugent unwillingly. He hadn't been working, really, but he pulled forward a book and affected to be engaged in it.

But when the Admirable had come in, there didn't seem to be any particular reason for his visit. His brown face hadn't whitened like Giffard minor's, and as for crying, no one on earth had ever seen him do that. But Nugent, looking at him from under his lids, saw in a minute that he knew, and that

despite his elaborate pretence of indifference, was taking it rather hard too.

Now, for the last year or so Nugent had seen more of the Middle School boy than their respective positions in the school warranted. Yet with that curious reticence that characterises school friendships the Admirable had told him very little about his home life. Giving his mind to the matter now, he remembered that the boy's mother was dead and that his father was something or other on a railway abroad.

"Oh, stop messing about with my books!" he said testily, after a minute. "You must know them by heart by this time. What do you want?"

"Nothing!" answered the Admirable drearily. But in spite of his churlish reception he didn't go.

"If you've come to jaw about your precious chimney climbing, perhaps you'll like to hear that I think what you're getting for it'll serve you jolly well right. And if you had broken your neck over the business I don't know that anyone here would have been the loser." This from Nugent, in a voice that would have turned milk sour.

The Admirable began to play nonchalantly with the tassel of the window blind. "Oh, I don't mind," he said. But Nugent knew better than to believe that.

"Let's see, your father's in China, isn't he?" he asked, remembering more of Crichton's domestic history as he proceeded.

"Yes," answered the Admirable. "But there'll be the girls and the kids at home—not that I care!"

"Well, I hope your father'll write and tell you what he thinks about you," observed Nugent uncharitably.

"Oh, he will, don't be afraid!" answered the Admirable. He had begun to try how high up in the air the window tassel could be made to go.

"Well, I'm off. I can't stick a chap like you any longer," said the elder boy, getting to his feet with an impatient jerk.

"May I stay here, Nugent?" asked his visitor, almost wistfully. "The chaps are at me so outside to get to know things."

"Well, I wonder they want to come within a dozen yards of a waster like you," said his elder severely. "Still, you can stay, if you like."

No one could say that he had handled the younger boy very gently. But by a curious coincidence his footsteps led him to the same place that Giffard's had done.

When Giffard entered the Captain's study he found the latter sitting on the edge of his bed doing nothing. Giffard wouldn't have intruded on him just then for the world if he

could have helped it. He knew how Farquhar must be feeling, and he hated the job before him.

"I say, Farquhar, that young brother of mine——" he began awkwardly.

"Oh, that's all right," answered Farquhar gruffly, and without raising his eyes. "Send him along any time you like and I'll give him his licking. I'm not such a cad as *that*!"

As there didn't seem anything more to say, Giffard didn't say it. But he found himself liking Farquhar better in this hour of his abasement than he had ever done before.

When Nugent arrived, Farquhar was sitting in just the same place. He hadn't stirred.

"Sorry to disturb you, Farquhar," Nugent began. "But it's about that little animal Crichton. He deserves all he gets, of course. Still, if you could see your way——"

"Oh, I saw my way the minute St. George spoke, of course," Farquhar assured him with a hard laugh. "It's not likely that I'd let the kids in for that. The brute knew what he was talking about when he said he'd make me cave in. You can send the Admirable along now. The other little beast's just about due."

He got off the bed to hunt up his cane as he spoke. It seemed to put some heart into him.

"Thanks, old chap," answered Nugent, in a more friendly tone than Farquhar had ever yet heard from him.

The public apology was a bitter pill to look forward to. And when next morning old Joseph brought him the message that the Doctor was waiting for them in hall, not one of them but would rather have faced the dentist twenty times over. Hythe accompanied them as a matter of course in that inglorious pilgrimage; Curwen didn't. He sat in his accustomed place an interested, and apparently unmoved, spectator of the proceedings.

Perhaps nothing had ever seemed to take quite such a long time as that walk from the door to the Doctor's desk. And certainly nothing in all their experience had ever been quite so humiliating.

The Doctor was not at his desk, he was standing up before it, very straight and stern. His face, in its young austere beauty, looked more like the St. George's than ever.

Farquhar stepped out a little from the rest. And looking up found what he had to say easier than he could have supposed possible.

"We've done what you said, sir. And I'm sorry we didn't do it before."

Really it sounded more than a formal apology. The Head seemed to think so, any-

way, and his mouth curved into a smile more warm and cordial and human than anything the pictured St. George could ever have achieved.

"Better late than never, Farquhar," he said. "And we will let that close the incident. Dismiss all!"

There was something quite sharp and peremptory in the last order. The new Doctor evidently wasn't the sort to gloat over a fallen enemy or to give anyone else a chance of doing so for long, either. But the school got quite used to these little lapses into humanity on the part of its Head-master in time.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. HYTHE ENJOYS HIMSELF

If the various threads of school interest have been dropped during the previous chapters, it is for the simple reason that everything had had to give way to that tremendous, breathless struggle with the Doctor. Each event, as it happened, had been the direct outcome of the previous one. There had been no breathing space, as it were, between the moment when Mr. FitzHerbert had got to business, to the moment when, in the person of its prefects, he had made St. Osyth's answer to the rein. During the process of that Homeric combat the whole world had stood still. Nothing else had seemed to matter. And it says something for its absorbing interest that while it lasted, Samborne had talked about it instead of footer, and Gegechkory had almost forgotten the existence of his cherished Brotherhood.

Whether they liked the Doctor or not, he was henceforward a person to be feared, or as a Bleater would have said, "minded." This fact once accepted, St. Osyth's had time to turn its attention to its own personal concerns.

There were the house-matches to be brought to a finish—not that there was ever much doubt about the result. As everyone could have told you at the start, the school-house came out first, with Doctor's following a good second, the Hittites nowhere, and Yago's hopelessly left. There was the great scholarship examination, not much more than a week ahead of them. There were the terminal examinations, which now that they had time to think about them, loomed in the near future like a black cloud. There was the agreeable realisation for Ayscough and his fellows that they belonged to a house without a head. There was also a sudden and altogether unaccountable recognition on the part of Giffard major of the claims of English Literature on his consideration.

Now, there had never been anything in Giffard's previous life to prepare one for such a conversion on his part. He had a good memory, and a bright, surface cleverness, which made him take to things like irregular verbs, for instance, like a duck to water, and enabled him to give the very best account of himself in an examination. But he never made any pretence of considering book-learning, however easily it came to him, as anything but a task, and an unwelcome interruption to the real life outside. That he would have voluntarily given up any hours he

could have put into the games, to the pursuit of general culture, would never have been believed by his contemporaries. It was perhaps because he realised this that he made Bunge his sole confidant.

Bunge was delighted to see him, of course, when he strolled casually into his study, on the afternoon following the Doctor's *coup d'état*. Being only a Fifth form fellow, Bunge naturally viewed the visit in the light of an agreeable condescension on Giffard's part. And his visitor seemed in a particularly affable mood too.

"How ripping it must be, to be as clever as you are, Bunge—in English literature, I mean," he added hurriedly, evidently afraid that without this qualification his visitor would have taken his remark for sarcasm.

"Am I?" asked Bunge, surprised, but flattered. "I run the Debating Society, of course, and I've read a frightful lot of novels, if that's what you mean."

"Well, they're literature, aren't they?" asked Giffard.

"I suppose so," answered Bunge, though it is possible that his father, the reviewer, might have returned another answer.

"Would you remember which book the Johnnies you read about belong to, by just hearing their names?" questioned Giffard,

with what seemed a really touching interest in Bunge's attainments.

"Rather!" said Bunge, with a confidence which, however, was quite justified.

"Well, I'll just put you through your paces," said Giffard playfully. "Who was Eugene Courvoisier, now?"

Bunge thought a minute. "Why, wasn't he that fiddling chap in 'The First Violin'?" he asked eagerly.

Giffard didn't commit himself in words. But his smiling nod seemed to give assent. "And Baron Gondremark?" he questioned further, with an air of wishing to see Bunge still further surpass himself.

"Why, that German beggar who bossed the show in 'Prince Otto,' of course," Bunge told him triumphantly.

Giffard looked as delighted over this utterance as a mother over the crowings of her first baby.

"How fine to know all that!" he said enviously. "And how jolly useful!"

"I don't know so much about that!" demurred Bunge, who up till now hadn't discovered anything strikingly utilitarian in his erudition.

"Whenever I hear anyone jawing about a person in a book and I can't place him, I feel such a fool!" Giffard volunteered.

How easily one may misjudge one's fellow

creatures. Without this explicit avowal, Bunge would never have credited his companion with so acute a sensitiveness.

"Should you mind if I sometimes came and asked you which books they come in?" asked Giffard with astonishing meekness.

"Of course I shouldn't mind, Giffard," answered Bunge, who, on the contrary, was immensely gratified by the request. "But how shall you know the names, if you don't know the books?"

The question was not an unnatural one. But Giffard seemed prepared for it somehow. "Oh, I mean names that are floating about in the air, you know—or that the chaps mention to me in conversation," he explained airily.

Having again received Bunge's assurances that he would do all in his power to remedy those defects in Giffard's education, which it seemed were preying on his mind, the Sixth Form boy took his departure. But it was wonderful how many names seemed to be floating about in the air just then, or forming topics of conversation among Giffard's friends. The latters' taste in novels seemed fairly catholic, too, if one were to judge by the widely divergent characters whose permanent address Giffard was anxious to discover.

But the odd thing was that Giffard's efforts

at self-improvement stopped almost as suddenly as they had begun. And when Bunge had added to his store of knowledge on the subject of some fifty story-book celebrities, they ceased altogether.

Unfortunately for the Bleaters, Yaegers did not enjoy their present democratic condition for very long. For the day after Hythe had taken part in that historic march, the Doctor sent for him. He was friendly enough. But what he had to say was sufficiently startling. It came on the boy without the slightest preparation, too.

"I want you to be head of Mr. Yago's house, Hythe, instead of Ogle," he told him.

Hythe made a rapid readjustment of his bearings. Then he said "Yes, sir," stoically enough.

It was the answer to an order, not a request, and the Doctor was glad that Hythe had the sense to understand it like that.

"You don't like it?" he asked, and then added in his impulsive way, "But you needn't answer that, my boy. I know, quite well, you don't. I don't expect you to. But we've all got to face unpleasant tasks sometimes. And one doesn't give the leadership of a forlorn hope to the person one trusts least."

"But, Ogle, sir?" protested Hythe.

"Not your affair, Hythe," the Doctor warned him, though not unkindly. "Ogle's punishment is between himself and me, and out of your jurisdiction altogether. You must let no sentimental considerations of that kind stand between you and the clear duty I have set you."

Hythe didn't pursue the subject. And the Doctor in his rapid, concise way managed to get a good deal of meaning packed into the next few sentences.

"Now, my dear boy, I know what lies in front of you. But I am not going to tell you what to do or how to do it. If you succeed no one will be more pleased than myself. But remember *winning the game* is a very little matter compared to *playing it*, in my eyes. Don't hit soft, whatever you do. And Classic though you are, you may find time to remember that the majority of those you are going amongst, though Moderns, are human beings like yourself, and belong equally to St. Osyth's. And if you could induce them to adopt the same view, even at the risk of its going to their heads, there would be no harm done."

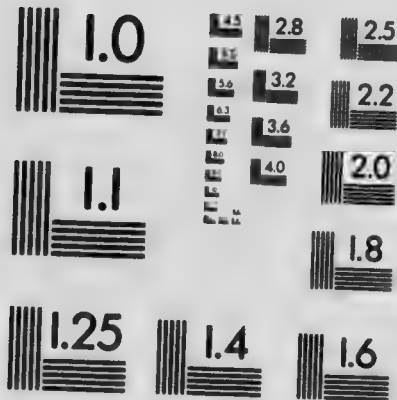
"Very well, sir," said Hythe, with that little grin about his mouth which the cryptic beauty of the Doctor's utterances generally brought there.

"That is all, I think, Hythe," said the



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Doctor. "I will have a study prepared for you. You can move into your new quarters to-morrow."

But Hythe lingered an instant. "My father's always been rather keen on my being in the school-house, sir," he said, as one who would offer a friendly warning of difficulties in that quarter.

"I will arrange it with your father. That will be all right, my boy," the Doctor told him. But for the first time in their acquaintanceship, Hythe seemed to doubt his powers.

That evening, the Doctor wrote a long letter to Hythe père, explaining his views at length. The next day, with the promptitude which had always marked his business-dealings, that gentleman appeared at the school.

It is not to be supposed that a person who had managed to get the whip hand of St. Osyth's would find the task of persuading Mr. Hythe beyond him. But it was a tough job. Reginald Taunton's parent wished to know exactly the Head's reason for the step, and his deep-seated suspicions that his son was being bereft of the society of the aristocracy, and relegated to that of an inferior order of beings, had to be allayed before he would begin to even consider the matter. Indeed, it was only by the Doctor's

adroitly bringing in that Malet's uncle was a bishop, and Phillpott's father in Parliament, that he was finally induced to give his consent.

As Mr. Hythe had started for St. Osyth's immediately on receipt of the Doctor's letter, he had had no time to inform his son of his movements. Thus he arrived at that moment in the latter's career when he was occupied in the domestic work of removing, or rather in directing the school porter where to place those luxurious extra trappings, in the way of easy chairs and rugs, which had excited Gegechkory's envy. His books he carried over himself.

The Doctor invited Mr. Hythe to stay and dine with him that evening. But the latter, though gratified, declined. He must get home, he said. He hadn't been feeling very well, lately. Oh, there was nothing really the matter with him, of course. He was only a little run down. Reggie and he were going to Nice as soon as the holidays began, and that would soon put him to rights.

"Well, you would like to see your son, of course," said the Doctor. "Joseph will show you to his study. Will you tell him, from me, that he may be with you until you go."

"I think, sir," said the Doctor's visitor, with that directness which characterised him, as

he bade his host adieu, "that the trustees showed some sense in choosing you, and that the school's got the right man in the right place, this time. Not but what you look over and a bit young for the job, though."

"Well, that's a disadvantage that time will mend every day, won't it, Mr. Hythe?" said the Doctor, laughingly shaking hands with him, in a way that wasn't calculated to give the worthy tailor any greater impression of his age.

The Doctor had told Joseph to conduct Mr. Hythe to his son's study. But the latter, though of course fully cognisant of the fact that owing to recent upheavals, Yago's was now to be Master Hythe's permanent abode, didn't know that the transference of his effects had begun already. Thus it was that he conducted Master Hythe's parent to the school-house instead of to his son's new address. Mr. Hythe dismissed him at the outside door, however. Joseph's manner, which seemed to have taken to itself all his old master's pomposity, wasn't such as to make him an ideal cicerone. Still, a side glimpse he got of the colour of the coin which Mr. Hythe had pressed into his hand made him slightly unbend.

Mr. Hythe quite enjoyed making his way upstairs alone. He dwelt lingeringly and with a guileless pleasure on the old stone steps,

trodden into great hollows in the middle, by the faithful feet of the British aristocracy. But advancing along the corridor, and turning the handle of the door to which he had been directed, he found a dismantled and comparatively empty room.

Yet Mr. Hythe glanced round it with a species of reverence. In any other place, he would have had the heartiest contempt for the plain regulation furniture it contained. But the fact that it was St. Osyth's furniture invested it with something not unlike a halo. Even the little iron bedstead, which had been slept on by his son, but which would now presumably be occupied by some budding representative of the nobility, enchained his attention.

But since even he could not linger for ever in the little bare room, and since he wanted to see his son with an eagerness and yearning that surprised himself, and that perhaps had something to do with the low state of health which he had half confessed to the Doctor, he came out again into the corridor. He heard voices in an opposite study a few yards to the left, and making his way there, knocked at the door.

In answer to a lusty, "Come in," he entered, to find a condition of things which filled his soul with an almost infantile admiration. A handsome red-haired boy

was perched on the arm of a basket chair: another boy, a tall, pale, aristocratic youth, Mr. Hythe's beau ideal of a young nobleman, was lolling on the broad window-seat. There was a tea-pot without a spout on the table, and a kettle singing on the fire, while a younger, and obviously deferential boy, was dutifully engaged in toasting muffins for the pair. It was almost an idyllic tableau of St. Osyth's taking its ease. And both these young bucks, in all probability, bosom friends of his son's, too! Mr. Hythe quite beamed upon them.

It was Giffard's study, but Nugent happened to be in at the time, having come on the Admirable's behalf to arrange with Giffard about the share of the costs to be borne by his minor, in that matter of making good the damage to the school property which the Doctor had so heartlessly decreed. The consultation was a lengthy one, neither the elder nor the younger Giffard ever being overburdened with pocket-money, and as Sandford, Giffard's fag, was in the act of making tea Nugent had stopped to partake of the cheering beverage. Thus it was he, too, came in for a share of Mr. Hythe's smiling regard.

The spectacle of a florid gentleman, in a grey frock coat, with mutton-chop whiskers, and a corpulent presence, gazing at them with

a look of almost affection, from the doorway, not unnaturally took the occupants of the study slightly aback.

"Can we do anything for you, sir?" asked Nugent, who was the first to find his voice. His tone wasn't as polite as the words, perhaps. Being translated it might almost have conveyed, "When you've finished staring, my elderly friend, you'll perhaps kindly tell us your business, and get out!"

But in his present appreciative mood Mr. Hythe was far from taking the question amiss.

"Now, that's manners!" he observed, really meaning it, too. "And since you're so obliging, young gentleman, you can do me the favour of telling me where I'm likely to find my son?"

"Your son, sir?" they asked enquiringly.

"Oh, you'll know him, when I mention him," answered Mr. Hythe, almost banteringly. "His name is Hythe!"

He had the air of having presented them with an agreeable surprise. Nugent smiled back rather vaguely. Hythe junior wasn't an Adonis, or anything of that kind, of course, but with his quiet manner, and steady eyes, you could never by any possibility have mistaken his class. And it wasn't the class of the individual in the grey frock-coat.

Mr. Hythe, still beaming upon them,

advanced a little way into the study, surveying it, and them, with an innocent inquisitiveness.

"And what might your names be, young gentlemen?" he asked with eager interest. "I'll be bound I've heard my son mention 'em. I hear a good many of your names, of course, him having so many friends here. I often say to him, 'Why don't you have your companions to stay with you in the holidays, my boy?' But he never does, somehow—seems to find his old dad sufficient company!"

In communicating this artless trait of his son's, Mr. Hythe was evidently under the impression that his audience was a highly sympathetic one. Giffard stared up at Nugent, helplessly. He was quite unequal to cope with a situation of this kind. But Nugent gave him an unexpected lead. Looking up at Mr. Hythe, without a trace of his usual superciliousness, he said politely:

"My name's Nugent, sir, and my friend here is Giffard."

"I've heard of you both," Mr. Hythe assured them affably. "You're a nephew of Colonel Nugent's, aren't you?" he added, turning to the spokesman. "A very nice gentleman, too, I've always found him, though a trifle particular. I know him, you see, though only in a business way—but

perhaps my son wouldn't like me mentioning that here!"

"He wouldn't mind, sir," Nugent assured him. "Catch Hythe caring about a little thing like that!"

"He always was peculiar, that way," Mr. Hythe admitted. "And you, young gentleman"—this to Giffard—"would you be any relation, now, to Sir William Giffard of Framlingham Abbey?"

"He's my father, sir," Giffard told him.

"Well, well," said Mr. Hythe, pleasantly impressed, "and both of you friends of my son!"

As he nodded to himself, once or twice, in innocent gratification, Nugent directed a look from the teapot to Giffard, which, although it astonished that young gentleman considerably, coming from such a source, did not admit of any doubt as to its meaning. But though it wasn't his own idea, nobody could have said more politely than he did:

"Won't you sit down and have a cup of tea, sir? Hythe's safe to be back to his study in a minute or two—he's just cut across to Yaegers with some of his things. And anyway, if he isn't, I'll hunt him up for you."

"Well, I don't mind if I do!" answered Mr. Hythe as pleased as a child at the invitation. He sat down in the big easy

chair which Giffard vacated, and with one scion of the landed gentry of England to pour out his tea, and another to hand him muffins—Nugent had dismissed Sandford by a nod at an early stage of the interview—he enjoyed himself very much indeed.

This cheerful environment naturally led him to talk about his son. It was a subject from which he could never very long keep away.

"Was Reggie at all bashful, when he first came among all you young gentlemen?" he asked with naïve curiosity.

"He didn't show it!" Nugent assured him.

"Called me Ginger, first go off, sir," said Giffard, nobly sacrificing himself to the exigencies of the situation.

Mr. Hythe laughed aloud. "Think of that, now!" he said delightedly. "Called you Ginger! Well, well!" he seemed to think the joke such a good one that Giffard began to wonder why he had always missed seeing its point.

But childish as he was on this one subject, Mr. Hythe possessed another side. And his natural shrewdness made him adapt himself now to his company.

"Talking about your uncle, Master Nugent," he said with a chuckle, "I don't mind telling you a story about him, when he wasn't so very much older than you are now, if you'll

promise not to give me away. I had it from my partner, who's a much older man than me, and who had the honour of serving your uncle when he was a boy, here at school. He used to order as many suits of clothes as he anyways dared to from him, and it was odd if he didn't find a couple of sovereigns in the trousers pockets of each of them, which were charged up to his grandfather in the bill!"

One can imagine with what fond satisfaction the Colonel's dutiful nephew listened to this idyllic anecdote.

Though Mr. Hythe's stories of the Colonel stopped here, which perhaps was just as well, in the matter of the Colonel's friends he was not so reticent, and his anecdotes of these gay Victorian guardsmen, in the days of their youth, made him the most charming companion for an afternoon's tea-party you can possibly imagine. There was that story, for instance, of how a young subaltern, known to the world, now, as a shining model of all an elderly military gentleman ought to be, had succumbed to the attractions of a county ball the night he was on duty. How his Colonel, who to his horror turned up at the same place, believing he recognised him, secured the one and only hack to be had, and had himself driven post-haste to barracks in order to catch his erring subordinate on the hop. How that intrepid youth, suspecting

his fell purpose, had clung on to the back of the swiftly moving vehicle, and slipping past a good-natured sentry, had received the Colonel at his entrance by another gate, with inimitable sang-froid. Then there was that other equally well-authenticated story of how for a wager—

"Dad!" the exclamation was Hythe's. On coming back for some more of his belongings, what was his amazement on passing Giffard's door to behold his parent seated in that gentleman's best easy chair, being entertained by both him and Nugent in the most sociable way. Hythe's tone couldn't well have sounded more astonished. But there was the old note of pleasure at the sight of him in his greeting, which his father always listened jealously for.

"Oh, there you are, my boy," said Mr. Hythe complacently. "I've just been making the acquaintance of your friends here. And I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more!"

Hythe gave him an affectionate nod. Then he sent one look, so piercing and hard that it was strange to see it on so young a face, straight at both Nugent and Giffard. I think if there had been one trace of a smile, or condescending expression, on either of their faces, it would have been the worse for them afterwards. But it would have been difficult

to find anything of the kind in Nugent's friendly, interested gaze, or Giffard's jolly face, grinning as it still was, at some of Mr. Hythe's more humorous anecdotes.

"Come along and have a cup of tea, if it's not too cold, Sc—old chap, I mean," said Giffard, catching himself up in time. "Your governor's been telling us some good 'uns just!"

An invitation to enter Giffard's study, much less to take tea with him, had never come Hythe's way before. But he accepted it now in the most matter of course way. And Mr. Hythe must have been a shrewder man than he was if he had gathered from his boy's light, easy chatter to the other two that they were anything but the bosom friends he fondly imagined them to be.

Being pressed, Mr. Hythe finished that story about the wager, and capped it by another even funnier, at which they all laughed very much.

"How shall you feel without your friends when you get over to your new quarters, sonny?" asked Mr. Hythe, evidently regretting now he saw them all on such good terms his too easy acceptance of the Doctor's arrangements.

"Lonely, dad!" Hythe told him gravely.

"And to think of your calling him 'Ginger,' you young limb!" said his father, evidently

unable to forget that crowning stroke. "But didn't he call you anything back?"

Giffard gave an agonized glance of appeal at the other two. Among the things of which Hythe had apparently been at some pains to keep his father in the dark was that witty nickname of his own bestowing. But how inexpressibly painful to have it brought out in present company!

"Oh, he wouldn't have liked to have hurt your son's feelings, sir!" Nugent explained blandly.

Again Hythe gave him that straight glance, and again it was softened by the look he got in return.

"And now, sonny," said Mr. Hythe, "if I'm to catch my train, I must be off. That Head-master of yours has given you a day off, so you can come to the station with me. I've a fly waiting outside. . . So good-bye, young gentlemen, and thank you!"

As he was shaking hands with his hosts a sudden wistfulness came into his face. "I suppose you're too big for tips?" he said regretfully.

Hythe's eyes were fixed on the further wall. There was no expression in his face, one way or another.

Nugent laughed in that odd, fascinating way of his. "I'm not, sir," he said. "I can't answer for Giffard, though."

Giffard looked up to see if he had heard aright. That Nugent, of all people in the world, could have brought himself to accept a tip from his uncle's tailor sounded like a fairy-tale. But what Nugent could do, he could. So he gave a laughing nod of acquiescence to Mr. Hythe's proposition.

Perhaps nobody ever handed over a couple of sovereigns with quite so much pleasure as Mr. Hythe did now. And to think that there were people who called the British aristocracy proud!

On the way to the station he was full of their praises. It was enough to make any father feel proud, he said, when he had only to appear on the scene to be immediately, for his son's sake, welcomed with opened arms and even fêted as you might say—this last word being called up by a memory of the muffins.

Hythe listened in the same old affectionate way.

"But let's talk about yourself now, dad," he said in sudden anxiety. "What are you looking like that for? Aren't you well?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said his father. "I'm just a little out of sorts, that's all. A little run down perhaps. Change of air will soon put all that to rights." It was the same tale he had told Mr. Fitzherbert.

"But you must see a doctor, dad!" said

Hythe insistently. "Promise me you will to-morrow."

"Very well, sonny," acquiesced his father, evidently pleased to be fussed over in this way. "But I shall be all right when the holidays come."

CHAPTER XVII

THE LOST EXAM. BOOKS

That anyone could become captain of the school, and captain of the games, by just pulling off an exam. was too startling an example of the laws of cause and effect to be realised all at once. But having once grasped the idea, St. Osyth's talked of nothing else.

Their thoughts naturally turned to the school-house first. There the odds were about even between Giffard and Hythe. But, strange though it seemed, they were obliged to admit that the other houses were setting up rather formidable rivals. Spratt, of Doctor's, by reason of the unimpeachable qualities of his English prose, might creep up —examiners were such chancey sort of people. Among the Hittites, Nugent was a dark horse. He might come out top or bottom of the list, according as the spirit moved him at the moment of his answering the questions. As usual, Yaeger's hadn't a look in. Ogle, and Malet, and Curwen, though good all-round men, couldn't hope to have the ghost of a chance against the bright particular stars just mentioned.

Under these circumstances, Hythe's removal to Yaeger's came like a bolt from the blue. And when Noad, who was always a Jonah, remembered that it had been a neck and neck struggle between him and Farquhar at the previous exam. there was something not unlike a panic in the dovecote. Hythe's ears ought to have burned, whilst he was escorting his father to the station, considering how his name was being taken in vain in the senior common-room just now.

The appearance of Giffard, who after the flights of diplomacy to which under Nugent's guidance he had just soared, felt he really needed the less rarified atmosphere of the common-room, was the signal for a general onslaught on him, by his school-house backers.

"You've got to bring it off, Giffard, old man," Berkeley told him. "I'll be hanged if I'll stick a Yaeger captain!"

"You'll be that in any case!" slapped back Phillpott, on whom the chastening effect of recent events was beginning to wear off.

"Oh, dry up, you freckled idiot! We've had about enough of you!" exclaimed Samborne. "I suppose I ought to be hot on Spratt getting it, as he's a Doctor's man," he added, his conscience pricking him. "But Giffard's such a sight better at the games.

And we don't want to come another cropper with Arundel next term."

"Nugent could get it like a shot, if he'd only swot for it a bit more," said Edwards resentfully.

"Well, let's hope he won't swot, then!" observed Samborne devoutly. "I'd rather have Spratt than him. Why, he'd walk off the field with a match on, if he felt like it. And he isn't the sort of chap anyone can say anything to, either."

"Except St. George!" grinned somebody, Nugent not being present. "Bates says he'll be able to take the mare out now, without being chased by old Baker's bull!"

"Fancy Scissors captain of the games!" sniggered Noad.

"I couldn't!" returned Samborne. "And I wouldn't, what's more!" he added ominously.

"Anyway, he got the school a goal in the house match!" put in Malet unexpectedly.

"Well, the ball must go somewhere when he kicks it," retorted Samborne, who seemed to be in a bigoted mood.

Ogle gave Malet an almost malevolent look. The slightest recognition that Hythe had a single redeeming point was gall and wormwood to his predecessor just then.

"If this Scissors of yours once became captain of the school, and captain of the games, all the others of us may as well go

and hide our diminishing heads in a bucket! He must be prevented," declared Gegekory.

"So he must!" agreed Samborne. "So buck up, Ginger, old man, or I'll flay you alive!"

"Oh, I'll have a whack at it, don't be afraid!" answered Giffard, flattered at being the person on whom everyone's hopes seemed to centre.

"I back Scissors, all the same!" declared Curwen, with all his native candour.

"And who are you, I should like to know?" sneered Samborne, all the more scornfully because his own fears jumped in the same direction.

"Well, if you really want to know, I'm the only one of all you chaps Georgy didn't spank, or make beg his pardon or something, I forget which, the other day!" answered Curwen, with modest satisfaction at the recollection.

The incident referred to, being too recent and painful for discussion, the occupants of the common-room dispersed in dudgeon.

The object of all this discussion came back from the station rather absent-mindedly. The change in his father's looks, which had become more noticeable as the flush of elation occasioned by the reckless festivities in which he had been indulging died down, bothered

him not a little. But how pleased he seemed at the reception Nugent and Giffard had given him! And how decent it had been of Nugent and Giffard too!

He directed his steps to his new abode almost with a pang. It was a greater wrench to leave the school-house than he could have believed possible. And the removal, coming as it did at a time when he was too busy to turn round almost, was an awful fag. His father's visit had taken up a good deal of time too—not that he grudged that. But it was with the idea of putting in a good two hours' work, now, that he turned to his bureau to gather up the exam. books which he had placed in a pile on the top, to be handy when he wanted them. It was with a sense of unreality, almost, that he saw that they had vanished, and that in their place was a small white card, placed with singular accuracy and precision in the very centre of the desk. And on this was written in printed characters:

"Beware!"

Hythe picked up the card, and turned it over. But there was nothing to be gained by that. It was just an ordinary, plain visiting card. The writing was in the usual print hand anyone would use for a disguise. There was no single mark or peculiarity about it to give the smallest clue to the writer.

There were about a dozen books missing altogether, text books and note books. Hythe got rather desperate when he thought of the latter. Then suddenly remembering that he had carried over Cicero's "Letters," and the "Medea" of Euripides, the two set books for the exam. at a later journey, and had placed them along with some other books in his cupboard, he pulled the door sharply open. The other books were there right enough, just as he had left them, but those two—with their underlined passages and marginal notes—were conspicuous by their absence. With a tightening of his mouth that boded no good to someone, he decided that whoever was responsible for their absence must have a pretty thorough acquaintance with the lay of the land.

No two people prepare for an exam. in the same way. There is that story about a boy who played with a particular button on his waistcoat, while answering questions in class. On the button being cut off by a malicious school-fellow, immediately before his viva, he was unable to collect his thoughts and failed ignominiously. Now without those scribbled-over text-books, which were peculiar to his own method of work, Hythe felt very much in the same position as the hero of the button.

He went out and made enquiries of the

porter. But beyond having seen him bring in the books, and put them on the bureau, the man knew nothing further. He had up Ayscough and Mothersole, and one or two others of the more prominent Bleaters of the house, and questioned them closely. But though the latter evidently considered the rag a pleasing inauguration of his rule, they were too obviously sincere in their regret that it had been carried out without their assistance, for Hythe not to believe them. He mentioned the loss to Curwen and Mallet and some other of the seniors, but beyond finding them unexpectedly sympathetic, it brought him no nearer to the solution of the mystery. It was when he went back to institute another exhaustive search that he got the first clue.

Behind the bureau, and half underneath the carpet, he suddenly caught the glint of something silver. On investigation, the object turned out to be a small silver pencil-case. And lest he should have any doubt as to the owner of this pretty thing, he found engraved thereon, "R. F. Giffard."

Now, it had not been Giffard's habit to disport himself in Hythe's study, even in the school-house, where it lay in the same corridor with his own. Nor did he often, if ever, grace Yaeger's with his presence. Thus, all things considered, the appearance of his

pencil underneath Hythe's bureau certainly seemed to call for an explanation.

Hythe put the pencil in his pocket, took the sinister little card in his hand and set out to pay an unaccustomed call.

Gegechkory was at home, he found on knocking at his study door. He received his visitor with a haughty and enquiring glance, which reminded Hythe of the airs he had assumed on first declaring the Brotherhood opened.

Hythe walked straight up to him and held the card a couple of inches before his eyes.

"Your property, I suppose," he said bluntly.

If it real'y was Gegechkory's property, he seemed in no hurry to take it up. "And why should you have that sort of suppose?" he asked.

"Because I found it on my bureau. And because whoever planked it down there bagged my exam. books at the same time. And because you can't get lower than that, that's why I thought it was you, or your precious Brotherhood!" Hythe answered.

"I have to tell you it is not me, or my precious Brotherhood!" declared Gegechkory, his eyes snapping fire.

"Well, I'll make it my business to find out," Hythe told him grimly. "And if you

have had any hand in it, you shall pay for that lie as well as for the rest!"

"You can research my study for your ridiculous books, if you like," cried Gegech-kory almost eagerly.

"Well, as you're not quite an idiot, Pony, whatever else you may be, I won't put myself to the trouble, thanks," said his visitor, turning on his heel.

Descending the staircase, and getting to his own old landing, he almost ran into Giffard, as the latter was coming out of the study, at his usual rattling pace.

"Well, here we are again!" said that gentleman humorously. "And what brings you back to your native shores?"

"Well, to give you this, for one thing," said Hythe quietly, handing over the pencil.

"Didn't know I'd moulted it!" said Giffard. "I should have been awfully mad if it had really gone, though. Where did you find it?"

"In my study. Under my bureau. Half an hour ago!" Hythe informed him.

"Rummy place!" said Giffard. "Fact is, I suppose I must have dropped it when I ran over to your study with a card-case your governor left behind him. You'd both started, so I brought it back for safety. Hold on a minute while I get it."

He bolted into his study - he spoke,

leaving Hythe in the corridor, just outside the open door. Then all at once an odd thing happened. With the swiftest movement, Giffard had swished the cloth off the table and thrown it over something on his desk. Hythe felt, rather than saw the furtive look that followed in his direction to see if the movement had been observed. But as the eyes of the new head of Yaeger's were apparently fixed on space, and his face a blank, Giffard wasn't able to discover much. Coming out of the study and carefully shutting the door he held up a little russian leather card-case that Hythe recognised as his father's.

"Here it is. Catch hold," he said, tossing it in Hythe's direction with wonderful self-possession, considering.

"Thanks! I'll send it on!" said Hythe, pocketing it.

"Good-night!" said Giffard.

"Good-night!" answered Hythe.

One might have imagined a more cheerful opening to Hythe's first day at Yaeger's certainly. But it had the unexpected result of bringing him into touch with the house from the start. When he got back he was surprised to find his study almost full of visitors, brought there either by sympathy or curiosity, or what was strange for Yaeger's, something not unlike patriotic concern for the

effect the loss would have on their man's chances for the coming exam. In an ordinary way they might have resented a school-house fellow's intrusion into their midst, or at best regarded it with indifference. But it was such a new experience for them to be running a promising candidate for anything whatever, that this adoption of him had a spontaneous quality that Hythe couldn't help finding pleasant.

Curwen was among his present visitors. He had come ostensibly to help Hythe to hunt for the missing volumes. But once landed in the study he was so busy in pointing out to their owner how far short his pictures fell below the canons of true art, to get much done that way. As Hythe *père* had bought them chiefly for their expensiveness, he may have been right.

But a curious reticence seemed to have come over Hythe on the subject everyone had come to talk about. He didn't give his visitors the impression that when he did lay his hands on the pulpit the latter would find the world a soft place. But, on the other hand, they left feeling that, on the whole, the loss of his books didn't affect him as much as it would have done some people.

He managed to convey the same impression in the common-room, the next evening, too.

"Have your exam. books really been

cribbed, Hythe?" asked Farquhar quite civilly for him.

"Yes," answered Hythe. "But Mr. Warre has lent me his until I can get new ones."

"Have your note-books gone too?" asked somebody.

"Yes," answered Hythe. Evidently he wasn't disposed to be communicative on the subject.

"When were they taken, do you know?" asked Farquhar again.

"Oh, some time yesterday," returned Hythe vaguely.

"How riling for you, though, to have to mug away without your notes. Shall you miss them much?" asked Spratt.

"Pretty well," Hythe returned, though not as if the affair unduly worried him.

"Were other books bagged, or only just your exam. books?" asked Samborne.

"Only my exam. books," answered Hythe, though rather unwillingly, it seemed.

"Wait till I catch the cad!" said Farquhar, who was getting noticeably more friendly to Hythe. "We must find out who was in your study yesterday."

"Well, lots of chaps might have been!" declared Hythe suddenly becoming expansive. "I was carting my things across from the school house, with the door wide open, on

and off, all afternoon. Half the house might have walked in."

"Perhaps you'll find you've shunted them down somewhere yourself," suggested someone, of an optimistical turn of mind.

"Well, I'll have another hunt," Hythe agreed pacifically.

It was difficult to get up any agitation in favour of a fellow who takes his loss so calmly as that. Perhaps it didn't matter so much to him, after all, and his new books would do him just as well. At any rate, the subject was dropped.

"My notes any use to you, Scissors?" drawled Nugent as Hythe was leaving the room.

Coming from a rival candidate the offer was at least a generous one.

"Oh, I think not, thanks," answered Hythe. "It would be more swot to tumble to another chap's notes than to do without. But thanks awfully, all the same."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE USES OF A LUGGAGE STRAP

Under any circumstances, Ogle must have found the situation a humiliating one. And it would have taken a really large nature not to have vented a certain amount of resentment on his supplanter. Ogle did not possess a large nature, and consequently did his little best to make Hythe's introduction to Yaeger's as disagreeable as he could. His offer of Asycough in the capacity of a fag was made in a moment of temper, otherwise it might have seemed a rather finished feature of the scheme.

The very sight of Hythe moving in his furniture, on that first afternoon, acted on him like a red rag on a bull. He came out of his study, which was only a couple of yards away, and regarded his operations with a scowl.

"What have you come for?" he asked, as offensively as he could.

"Change of air!" answered the new head.

"Well, we ought to be honoured, I'm sure!" sneered Ogle. "Did you come for the sake of the place?"

"No, for the company!" answered Hythe gravely.

"Mr. Yago wants you, Ogle!" said Asycough running up at this moment.

Ogle was turning off with a scowl, when Hythe stopped him. "I shouldn't go with that on your back!" he said quietly.

Ogle put his hand behind him, and snatched away a piece of note-paper, which had been lightly pinned on the edge of his jacket. On it, in good legible print-hand, were to be read the words:

A REMNANT. SHOP SOILED.

WORTH ONLY 2s. 6d.

Ogle looked as though he could have killed someone. But somehow Hythe, standing up cool and collected in his shirt sleeves, nailing a picture to the walls, wasn't the sort of person to tempt one to start hostilities on. But with the smaller quarry it was a different matter. And this was no more than poetical justice, when one considers how striking a resemblance the printed characters bore to Ayscough's own handwriting.

The deposed prefect thrust the paper furiously into his small fag's face. "What's this?" he stormed.

"How should I know, Ogle?" returned Ayscough, with a provoking giggle. "Unless it's meant for you, and that you're what's left of being a prefect, and——"

Before he could finish, Ogle had taken him by the coat collar, and pitched him bodily into Hythe's study.

"Since you've collared my place, you may as well have my fag, too," he exploded. "I make you a present of him."

"All right!" agreed Hythe, going on with his work. "I haven't got one, and perhaps he'll be better than nobody. Suppose you get to business, Coughdrop, by giving me a hand with this picture. Here, hold it straighter than that, can't you?"

Ayscough apparently couldn't. But as every time his hand slipped, Hythe's hammer unfortunately slipped too, and in that very place, it was wonderful how quickly he came to a knowledge of the perpendicular.

But the little incident of the hammer notwithstanding, Ayscough took his new duties very lightly. So lightly, indeed, that before the end of the second day he and his new master had come to words.

"I suppose you've seen better toast than this in your life?" said Hythe at tea-time, holding out for his fag's inspection a black and gritty compound that Ayscough had apparently made *on* the fire instead of before it.

"I have, but I didn't know you had!" the small boy answered back.

Hythe looked up really startled, for a

minute. He hadn't been boss of the show at the school-house, or even a person to be very much considered, but you wouldn't have caught a Bleater coming within a hundred miles of cheeking him like that.

"Didn't you really?" he said, and laughed.

"Well, now you've found out your mistake, you'll be able to do it better to-morrow."

"Anything else?" demanded Ayscough pertly.

"Yes, several things," Hythe told him, and then and there entered into a disquisition on what he considered the whole duty of a fag, which left his small factotum faint, yet defiant.

"Perhaps you'd like me to black your boots, Hythe?" he said with an attempt at sarcasm.

"Well, if I did like, I'd see that you did them," answered his elder calmly. "But that will do for now."

Ayscough departed, but with such violence that in his exit he knocked against Hythe's ink-stand and sent it flying. Being made to pick it up, because Hythe seemed to like the fluid in its own receptacle, instead of having it dispersed about the room, the state of his feelings was such that he had to slam the door. Being made to return and shut it gently since that, too, seemed a point on which he had ideas of his own, the little

boy felt that if he didn't get even with him soon, he should burst.

When Hythe entered his study after third lesson, the next day, and found every pair of brown boots he possessed laid in a neat row along the floor, and all blacked with a blacking of so aggressive and ebony a tint that they reminded you—in parts—of a raven's wing, he came to the conclusion that the time to take Master Ayscough's education in hand had arrived. His decision was strengthened by the discovery that though the contents of his inkstand could scarcely be called dispersed about the room and were certainly confined to their own receptacle, the latter lay bottom upwards on the table-cloth, in such a position that it could not be lifted up, or removed, without the whole of the fluid being spilled. If Hythe had not known how to work that trick himself, it might have filled him with the wonder which comes to ingenuous souls, as to how the apple got into the dumpling, or the fly into the amber.

The pair of shoes which had come in for the most generous attention were new and expensive. The table-cloth, too, which would receive the contents of the ink-pot, when it was made to resume its normal position, was a rather costly Indian one. So that it says good deal for Hythe's sense of humour that

he could have grinned as he did at the sight. Still, it didn't prevent him marching to the end of the corridor, and letting off a lusty "F-a-g!" in the direction of the junior common-room.

Asycough made no sign. Hythe called again, with the same result. Not waiting to try the effect of a third summons, he strode over to the common-room door and opened it for himself.

There was a great din, as usual, going on inside. Still a school-house junior would have been expected to answer to a summons of that kind across a battle-field. But Ayscough, as anyone could see, was at the present moment very busy. By some means he had become possessed of a box of daylight fireworks, warranted not inflammable, and was testing the worth of the guarantee on "It's" little palm. "It's" lively demonstrations of the extreme mendacity of the advertisement was adding to the general uproar.

The appearance amongst them, for the first time, of their new head, gave a refreshing fillip to the proceedings.

"Didn't you hear me call, Ayscough?" The question sounded almost mild. And the speaker didn't seem to be in the weak and futile rage Ogle would have been in, either.

"No, Hythe," answered Ayscough ab-

stractedly, and without taking the trouble to look up. "Hold still, 'It' you little beggar, till I've tied this one on you!"

The uproar had entirely ceased now. Everyone's attention was concentrated on the delicate little drama Ayscough was so thoughtfully supplying them with.

But a repetition of his former sufferings, even in the good cause of a rag, was beyond "It," and taking advantage of a moment when Ayscough had managed to get in a look at Hythe out of the tail of his eye, he got away. His tormentor made a rapid grab at him. But he had advanced an inch too far in the enemy's direction. As he plunged forward, Hythe put out his leg, over which Ayscough naturally tripped. The next instant, he felt himself wriggling in the air. Tempted by the position he offered, Hythe had caught him up by the seat of his trousers, and was holding him aloft by one hand. In the confusion of arms and legs that ensued, he looked for all the world like an animated tortoise, or one of those vibratory spiders one sees the hawkers dangling from a piece of elastic in the street.

"'It' will have to wait," his captor informed him. "It's your turn now, to have something tried on you," and always cheerfully, and always holding his victim in the same ignominious position, he bore him away before

their eyes. The sight somehow made the junior common-room feel depressed.

Arrived at the study Hythe dropped his prize into one of the big chairs as though he had been a puppy. Turning a somersault the better to get to his feet, Ayscough was at the door like quicksilver, only to find that Hythe had locked it on entering, and pocketed the key. This forestallment of a person's natural desires was one of the many unpleasant habits that were growing on him lately.

Cornered, in this unexpected fashion, Ayscough began to find he didn't like the situation. His eyes involuntarily went to the inkstand. So did Hythe's. Leaving there in confusion, they perversely strayed to the boots. So did Hythe's. Then, as though fascinated, they fastened on those of Hythe himself. And the next thing was, that he found himself saying ingratiatingly:

"If it's the boots you mean, Hythe, I couldn't get any brown polish. I had to use blacking!"

"Well, I'm going to give you the right stuff now," Hythe told him coolly.

Having already bowed himself in the house of Rimmon, Ayscough went a step further, and with the air of one who would humour the brute, enquired with a propitiatory smile,

"What's that, Hythe?"

"Kid-reviver!" answered the head of Yaeger's with great promptitude.

Ayscough's smile became rather sickly. He was waiting to see where the joke came in.

He hadn't to wait long. "Just get the strap off that portmanteau of mine there—sharp!" said the elder boy, in quite a new tone of voice.

And Ayscough, in spite of a rather nasty buckle, did get it off—sharp!

"Now bend over that chair!" said the other.

And Ayscough did that too. And after a minute, nobody could have more faithfully attested that a luggage strap, with the buckle end wound tightly once or twice round Hythe's hand to give him a purchase, was as searching a weapon as any small boy could have the ill-luck to encounter. The exercise over, he was assisted to his feet with a jerk.

"You needn't put it back," said Hythe considerably. "Suppose we string it up on this nail." He dislodged a picture as he spoke, and hung the more questionable ornament in its place. "It'll come in handy, you know—next time you want to black my boots!"

There still remained the matter of the ink. But the little boy had had about as much as

he could stand, as Hythe, having obeyed one part of the Doctor's advice, at least, perhaps knew.

"Some chaps would have blubbed over that, Coughdrop," he said with something appreciative in his voice, which the little boy found himself thinking over afterwards. "As you didn't, we'll let it pay for the ink. And if it saves you from being such a silly little ass again my table-cloth's cheap at the price! And now cut!"

The day of the examination came at last. And Yaegers as the observed of all observers began to experience quite a new sensation. Even Ayscough, to his own immense surprise, found himself breathing more subdued feelings of hatred towards his oppressor, and actually almost wishing that he would win.

"But I say, you know, if he does come out top he'll be captain of the school. And we could never stick a Modern for that!" Mothersole reminded him.

"He isn't a Modern!" objected Ayscough. "And, anyway, it would be rather sporting for our house to romp in winner, wouldn't it?"

Our house! Surely the spirit of the time was changing.

There was quite a little body-guard to escort Hythe to the Sixth form class-room, where the exam. was to be held. On the

way, Curwen pointed out what a pull it gave Giffard that Hythe had lost his books in the way he had. He then dilated on the fact that Spratt could turn out faultless prose at about the same rate that an ordinary person could unwind cotton off a reel. Having added his opinion, that if Nugent happened to be in the mood, Hythe himself would be nowhere, he was obliging enough to add that he had known worse men creep in, after all. Malet said, "Don't crock yourself up over it!" with an almost paternal solicitude, while Phillpott clapped him on the back with a vigour of emotion Hythe could have done without. And it was to a friendly chorus of "Buck up, old chap! You're all right! You won't find it half the swot you think!" that the head of Yaeger's entered the place of doom.

The exam. was like the rest of its kind only more so, as it seemed to the labouring, inventing, frantically-writing mortals, who were now in its toils, Latin seen and unseen, Greek seen and unseen, English Essay, and a whiff of French, each after their kind, came up, and were polished off, or the reverse. The exam. lasted two days, and on each of these Ayscough, who had resolved for the time being to waive his prejudices, and feed his champion up, so to speak, on the sort of toast he seemed to have a weakness for, dis-

covered to his annoyance that he had been invited out to tea. Really it almost seemed as though Hythe was getting popular!

When, for the last time, Mr. Warre said, "Time, gentlemen!" and the last whirling scratch of the pens to get in yet another word had come to an end, the Sixth discovered that the effort had left them limp.

"How did you get along?" Berkeley asked Giffard eagerly.

"Oh, not so bad," answered that youth, who seemed fresher than the rest. "Anyway, I got a lot down."

"If only you have not let that pork give you a beating!" breathed Gegechkory.

Hythe was instantly surrounded by a crowd of eager questioners, whose numbers somewhat surprised the school-house.

"What was it like?" they called at him eagerly, as soon as his head appeared outside the door.

"Oh, mucky!" Hythe declared. He was tired. That last week of working without his books, which was equivalent to making bricks without straw, had taken it out of him. Perhaps, too, that curious sixth sense which makes some people feel the thrum of coming disaster in the air, had something to do with his obvious depression.

Spratt seemed to have gone solid for the Essay: while Nugent's look of utter boredom,

told the Hittites that they hadn't much to hope for from him. According to his own showing at any rate, Giffard seemed to have come off best.

Farquhar had been quite a gentleman of leisure during the past few days. It had given him time to think things over, while the others were pegging away at the examination, which was to give one of them the position now held by himself. And he had a little talk with the Doctor which strengthened some of his reflections. It began in a friendly way, and ended in a friendly way, but somehow it didn't leave Farquhar with quite such a comfortable conviction of his own perfections as he generally enjoyed. And one result of this was that the Captain of St. Osyth's actually strolled over to Yaeger's, to pay an unsolicited call on its new head.

Hythe was astonished, of course. He didn't even ask his visitor to sit down, for the minute, making sure he had come on some business errand or other. But it seemed, after all, that the visit was a purely social one. Farquhar asked him how he had found the papers, and Hythe answered that he'd found them "sickening." Farquhar said that that wasn't a bad sign, although he couldn't remember having felt like that himself last year. Then they talked footer, and to

Hythe's surprise he found that the Captain had actually noticed that goal he had got for the school-house in the last match. On being pressed for his views on Yaeger's, its new head without gushing, said that it was "all right."

Then the conversation languished a little. Indeed, it got so jerky towards the end, that Hythe began to suspect that he had been right in his first conjecture, and that the Captain had some special object in calling, after all. But it wasn't until he had got to the door, with his hand on the handle, that Farquhar brought it out.

"I've given you your colours, Hythe," he said. "I thought perhaps you'd like to know."

"Thanks!" said Hythe in his usual quiet way, although the colour had flushed into his cheeks. What boy alive wouldn't have liked hearing an announcement like that?

He ought to have had them long ago, of course. But, as the Doctor had said of Farquhar, on a recent occasion, "Better late than never!"

"Good-night!" said Farquhar.

"Good-night!" said Hythe. "I suppose we shall see something of you, when you're at Sandhurst?"

"I shall put in as much time as I can!" Farquhar assured him.

Farquhar didn't say that he ought to have given Hythe his colours before. Hythe didn't say that he thought it was very decent of Farquhar to have come to tell him, himself. Farquhar didn't say that when he came down to the old place, he hoped to see more of Hythe than he had done in the past. Hythe didn't say that it was rather a topping idea of Farquhar's. It was just that commonplace "Good-night" between the pair, and that couple of matter-of-fact sentences. Yet it managed to say all this, as is the queer way of boyhood.

The next day Hythe was sent for to the Head-master's study, in the middle of Mr. Warre's Latin class. Mr. Warre looked as surprised as he did himself, and suddenly anxious.

When he got to the study the sight of the Doctor's face was enough to tell Hythe that serious news awaited him.

"Yes, sir?" he asked in a curious, still way. Afterwards, he realised that without any words being said he had known the nature of the news.

The Doctor's kind hand was on his shoulder. "My dear boy!" he said. And with that firm and friendly grasp to steady him, Hythe learned that his father was dead.

A day or two afterwards when Hythe had

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gone away—the Doctor had driven him to the station himself—they heard the result of the examination. Hythe, in spite of that setback of his lost books, had come out first on the list, and was, in consequence, Captain of the school.

CHAPTER XIX

THE NEW CAPTAIN

The prospective joys of the summer term brought St. Osyth's back in fairly cheerful spirits. But there seemed changes about in the old place, somehow. For one thing, there had been interior alterations, but as these included extra bath-rooms, and other luxuries of that kind, the most conservative of them could scarcely object. Still less could they take exception to the fact that the old iron bars had been removed from the dormitory and study windows. And a yet more pleasing prospect of liberty was opened out in the announcement that the boundary of their walks abroad had been considerably enlarged. Ottley Wood, with all the myriad delights it promised for half holidays, was now within bounds. It had been forbidden to them before, from the fact that one of the lowest public-houses in the district had to be passed in order to reach it. To his more cautious elders it might well have seemed that the new Doctor was taking big risks. Perhaps it didn't directly occur to anyone to connect these changes with that old sermon of his in

which he had said that it wasn't bolts and bars, but a fine pride in himself that was needed to keep a boy in the decent ways. But the spirit of the utterance may have reached them, nevertheless, to be crystallized in time into that most potent force the "form" of the school.

Another surprising thing, too, was the way in which St. Osyth's numbers had increased. You could scarcely turn a corner without meeting a fresh face. The Doctor must have had a lot of social influence somewhere, to have accomplished so much in so short a time. But what specially struck St. Osyth's was the curious way in which the new-comers had been distributed. Yaeger's was so choked up with them that one wondered that the authorities had not pressed the coal-cellars into their service, but they were without exception of the Classical persuasion, while the other houses, to their disgust, had received an unwelcome contingent of Moderns.

Whether from their natural stupidity, or from a casual talk the Doctor had managed to have with each of them, or because they were already in touch with the new influences at work in the place, the new-comers seemed to be strangely impervious to the rigid barriers of caste that prevailed at St. Osyth's. A couple of isolated instances will serve to illustrate this.

"Are you a Classic or a Modern?" a little group of Middle School boys, of the ruling race, had demanded of a new-comer of their own size, the first day.

"A Modern, I believe," answered the latter, but without the blush of shame that ought to have accompanied the admission. Then, observing the lofty scorn on the faces of his interlocutors, he gave utterance to a surprised:

"But does it matter?"

Did it matter! Ye gods and little fishes! The outraged Classics were just teaching him whether it mattered or not, when Malet, observing the fray from a window—Malet, mind you!—threw up the sash, and provided the young custodians of St. Osyth's honour with quite a little stack of lines on the first day of the term.

The other incident was in connection with the juniors. A young and verdant Bleater, having strayed from the fold into the big drive, with the object of making himself acquainted with his new abode from the start, had the misfortune to encounter Giffard minor and Merton, on their way to the playing fields. Since no Bleater could be a Modern, the all important question was rendered unnecessary in his case. Its place was taken by the one only second in importance.

"Which house are you?"

"Yago's!" answered the new-comer, with something so like pride in the announcement that the others stared at him.

"Yah!" they said simultaneously, with a derision which staggered the little boy.

"Isn't it the swell house?" he asked in his innocence. "I thought it had got the Captain!"

Our young friends made it their business to try to hammer some sense into St. Osyth's latest recruit. The process was so painful that their pupil lifted up his voice and wept. And a big boy coming in at the gate, he was minded to make him a confidant of his wrongs. The big boy, who turned out to be the Captain himself, having impartially spanked his informant for telling tales, turned his attention to the other two, and knocked their heads together with a thoroughness which impressed the young and verdant one very much. This, in the words of the poet, was Hythe's welcome home.

There was very little in Hythe's manner to show the great trouble he had just gone through. But he was a little thinner, and his face had sharpened. He looked older, too, and more responsible somehow.

The Doctor was very kind, but he did not make much reference to the boy's loss. It was a case where words could do nothing, and

it was better not to keep probing at the wound.

But what little he did say, Hythe liked to hear.

"You're very young, Hythe, to stand alone," he said with a cordial helpfulness in his voice, "but if you ever want a friend, or a head-master, or both, you know I am always here!"

"Thank you, sir!" was all Hythe said. But he looked as though it was a good sort of thing to know, too.

"This isn't the time to talk to you of the responsibilities money brings with it," continued the Doctor. "For the next year, at least, you are not to give them a thought. You are still a school-boy, and your battleground is here. Afterwards, your wealth will be an open road to much. For this little space of your life, thank Heaven! it will only be the labour of your head and your hands that will count."

"Yes, sir," was all Hythe said again. But the Doctor seemed quite satisfied. Mr. Hythe's will had been proved at some rather remarkable figures. But he fancied that the brain behind the steady eyes would supply the necessary ballast.

It was a different coming back to any Hythe had had before. Yaeger's really seemed glad to see him. Phillpott and Malet

came at him in quite an eager way, and Curwen, after telling him that he looked "off colour," shook hands with him with the greatest heartiness. Even Ayscough, perhaps as much to his own surprise as Hythe's, presented himself on his own, in his study, and with an air of conveying that it was an isolated instance, and that Hythe mustn't presume on it, signified his readiness to afford him any little assistance he might fancy he required.

"All right, Coughdrop. Suppose you help me to unpack!" Hythe agreed. He had spoken good-naturedly, and really with some idea of meeting his little fag half-way. But as he unfortunately nodded at the portmanteau, round which Ayscough's old friend was securely strapped, the latter took it as a direct personal insult, and flounced down on his knees to perform the required service, with a thud which shook the floor.

The first twinkle which had come into Hythe's eye since his trouble appeared there now. But it was perhaps owing to this little exhibition of temper that after he had watched Ayscough unbuckle the abhorred object, he gave him a dry direction of "Same old place," accompanied by a glance at the nail on the wall which made it impossible to mistake his meaning.

But the cordiality he had met with at

Yaeger's did not extend to the senior common-room, when he entered it with Malet and Curwen a little later. Its occupants returned his greeting civilly enough, but there had been a sudden hush on his entry, that made him feel that he himself had been the topic of conversation. Involuntarily he stiffened a little. Involuntarily, too, such members of Yaeger's as happened to be in the room edged up to him.

From the moment of his entering, the room began to fill. It almost seemed as though some interested person was acting the part of whipper-in. And when the members of the First Eleven suddenly detached themselves from the rest and with Samborne as spokesman, came up to him, Hythe knew that he had to face something really serious.

"I suppose the Doctor's told you that you're Captain of the school, Hythe," Samborne began.

The Doctor had not neglected to supply that piece of information, and Hythe signified as much.

"Well," continued Samborne, "I'm not going to pretend that we've not sorry, it hasn't come to a more all round man. But we've made up our minds to lump it!"

Hythe forebore to enquire what the speaker thought would have happened had

they decided on any other course, and when Phillpott began to mention how kind it was of them, he stopped him.

"I suppose you'll admit that you're not much to shout about at the games?" advanced the spokesman.

Hythe admitted it candidly.

"There was that goal——" Curwen was beginning when Hythe's "Quiet, old man," shut him up.

"Well," growled Samborne, whom the other's calmness was beginning to irritate. "We want a better man than you for Captain of the games. And what's more we're going to have one!"

"Yes?" said Hythe, politely questioning. But he had no need to suppress Yaeger's this time. Now that that tone had come into his voice, they felt they couldn't do better than leave him to do his own fighting.

"Look here, Hythe," said Berkeley, speaking more pacifically. "We've agreed to stick you as Captain of the school. But we don't think you're good enough to be Captain of the games. And we want you to give up to Giffard here."

Though they said nothing the Yaeger men were ringing round Hythe. They looked different, somehow, from what St. Osyth's had been accustomed to consider them—bigger and more formidable. Or perhaps it was

only the spirit of pride, which the Doctor was inculcating, was making them carry their heads higher. But whatever it was, it improved their appearance.

"What do you say, Giffard?" Hythe asked that gentleman directly.

"Oh, well, I didn't propose it, if that's what you mean," answered Giffard, rather sheepishly. "But since everyone's so hot about it, I don't mind taking it on—for the sake of Arundel an' that."

"That's just it, Hythe!" cut in Samborne with real eagerness. "It's the most blithering arrangement that ever was, making the Captain of the school, Captain of the games, whether he's a nailer like Farquhar, or a duffer like you! So do, like a good chap, stand out. We can't afford to have you this term, and that's a fact. Why, even with Farquhar as Captain, Arundel simply walked over us last match. Think what it'll be with you!"

Hythe's face had gone rather strained. The interview was getting more painful for him as it proceeded.

"The Captain of the school always has been the Captain of the games," he said at last. "I don't know that I could give it up if I wanted to."

"Oh, yes, you could," they assured him persuasively. "St. George is so sweet on

you just now that you could talk him into it."

"I don't think so," said Hythe. "Still, it doesn't matter, anyway, as I'm not going to do it."

Yaeger's breathed again. Samborne on the contrary choked.

"I don't say I'm as good a man as Giffard, of course," went on Hythe temperately.

"You couldn't!" This from Noad.

"No," agreed Hythe, "I couldn't. But you chaps know as well as I do, that being Captain isn't the sweetest job in the world. And you know, too, what a pull it gives you over the school being Captain of the games. Well, I'm Captain here, whether I like it or not. And I'm not going to dish all my chances at the start, as I should, if I stood down for Giffard."

"Not even for the sake of the cup?" almost pleaded Samborne.

"No," said Hythe, though not as if he enjoyed having to say it.

Phillpott was evidently dying to clap him on the back. But he refrained. With that face on him, the Captain didn't look as though he needed to be bolstered up with any little encouragements of that kind. And perhaps the quiet steady front which Yaeger's, copying their leader, were presenting to the enemy, was the most affective attitude they could have chosen.

"Suppose we won't have a rotter like you at any price?" suggested someone.

"You can't help yourselves!" Hythe answered.

"Suppose we make Giffard Captain, and send in a challenge to Arundel on our own?" asked someone else.

"Arundel wouldn't accept your challenge," answered Hythe as before.

The muscles in Samborne's bull-neck began to swell. "Well, if they accept yours, they won't see much of us!" he retorted truculently.

Hythe did lose a little of his calm at that. This was a set-back he could never have contemplated, even in his worst nightmare. "What do you mean by that?" he asked slowly, his face flushing ever so slightly.

"Well, just this," said Samborne brutally. "You can play your match yourself. The Eleven withdraws. We won't play with you!"

"Not even for the sake of the cup?" put in Nugent, with his softest drawl. It was the first contribution to the conversation he had vouchsafed.

Samborne gave him a furious look. "You needn't talk!" he snorted. "A slacker at games, like you, isn't worth listening to!"

The others had noticed the signs of distress on Hythe's face with real relief.

Samborne had got there at last, it seemed. Hythe couldn't do without them, of course. The mere idea was enough to make a cat laugh. Yaeger's was standing by him, but then there wasn't a single Yaeger man in the eleven. Nugent wasn't in, either, though that had always been his own choice, of course. Thus with the exception of Edwards and Pease, a fellow Hittite, the team was made up exclusively of men from either the school-house or Doctor's.

How could Hythe do without them? And that as it happened was just the question Hythe was asking himself in something not unlike despair. He couldn't do without Giffard, of course, who was the best bat by a long way the school possessed, nor Berkeley, who could be reckoned on to break the heart of any bowler, nor Samborne, who was the man of men to stop a rot, nor Gegechkory, who had a habit of supplying such pleasant surprises, nor Spratt, whose balls, when he warmed up to his work, were so frightfully swift and so difficult to field, nor Wallace nor Ivor nor Edwards, nor Pease—nor any one of them, in fact. And if he could, who in the world had he to put in their places?

"I hope you won't do that, you chaps," he said slowly, at last.

"Shan't we, that's all!" they retorted, in eager and complacent chorus. All the same,

though, it sounded as though they were breathing more freely. Just at first, laughable as the idea was, it had always seemed as though Hythe was going to stand them out.

"This time, at least, you have got the check-mate!" breathed Gegechkory softly.

The word acted on Hythe like a spur. "Well, I'm sorry for that," he said quietly to the others, ignoring Gegechkory. "But if you won't, you won't. We shall just have to do without you."

A little gasp went up. For a moment it seemed as though the Moderns were going to lose that steady poise of theirs, and let themselves go. Like Gegechkory, they, too, had thought that it was check-mate.

"But how can you do without us?" vociferated the others, in artless amazement.

"Well, you're not the only chaps in the School," Hythe reminded them.

"No, but we're the only chaps who can play," they retorted hotly. "You can't make up an eleven against Arundel out of the rotters who're left."

Hythe slightly shrugged his shoulders, for only answer.

"But, hang it all man! You must be a raving lunatic! You ought to be locked up!" roared Samborne. It seemed, for a moment, as though he was going to hit out

bodily at the Captain. Hythe seemed to think so, at any rate, for his fists clenched involuntarily, while Yaeger's walled up still tighter.

"Perhaps, when Arundel's wiped the field with you, you'll remember to-day?" remarked someone gloomily.

"We all shall!" Hythe assured him.

As it seemed like knocking their heads against a stone wall to persuade or threaten him any longer, a puzzled silence came over the room. It was Hythe who broke it.

"Now, you chaps," he said, and except that he wasn't so blustering, he might almost have been Farquhar, with that authoritative tone in his voice, "let's get this thing settled. Are you all agreed?"

"I should think we were," said Berkeley, on behalf of the school-house.

"Rather, you crack-brained ass!" said Samborne, speaking for Doctor's.

"You too, Nugent?" Hythe's voice was curiously expressionless.

"Well, since our little Sammy here doesn't seem to appreciate me at my true value, you can count me in with you, if you like, Scissors," said Nugent carelessly.

The Hittites were startled. They followed Nugent's lead in most things. But in this instance, they had certainly expected him to go with the elect.

Hythe's eyes brightened up wonderfully. He had been fighting before with the courage of desperation. To look at him, a minute or so ago, he would have done for the effigy of a person who could never smile again. Now, with that dancing light in his eyes, and that sudden buoyant turn of his head, it was quite easy to imagine him indulging in the exercise. Everyone in the room could feel the change in him. It was as though a ton's weight had been rolled off his shoulders.

"Well," he said, in quite an altered voice, "that gives us two of the old team—Edwards and Pease—thank goodness."

Now Edwards and Pease came in at the tail end of the Eleven, as anyone could have told you. Still, it was distinctly gratifying to find themselves valued as much as all that. And that rapturous note in the Captain's voice turned the scale. So, though still dubiously, they agreed to back Hythe up, "if he really was going to play the goat."

"Then that's all," said Hythe. Really he might have been dismissing the Eleven.

"But what are you going to do, man?" groaned Phillpott in baffled rage. "We can't have you making St. Osyth's a laughing stock, all over the place."

"That's our business!" said Hythe coldly. "You've backed out of your own accord. Nobody asked you to. And as you're not

going to help pull us through, we can do without your advice."

"I think you're a skunk!" said Samborne when he could articulate.

"Really? But that doesn't make me one, you know!" retorted the Captain with something of his old grin.

CHAPTER XX

THE DECENT WAYS

When one thinks how painful and upsetting the events recorded in the previous chapter must have been to any captain, in the beginning of his term of office, it is a wonder Hythe did not lose heart, especially with his own overwhelming personal trouble so fresh upon him. He was not strikingly popular, as it was. But what the feelings of St. Osyth's would be towards him, if the first eleven's cheerful prognostications came true, he could easily imagine.

Coming back from the common-room now, and convincing Sandford on the way that the school-house wall was an unsuitable place in which to draw caricatures of himself, and Mothersole, that tobogganning downstairs on the black-board was an equally unsuitable means of progression, he went into his study and shut his door. Sitting down, with his elbows on the table, and his head on his hands, he proceeded to do some of the hardest thinking of his life. At the end of half an hour he made his way to the house of the Hittites to see Nugent. He could

scarcely have chosen a more inopportune time.

He got a rather sharp "Who's there?" instead of "Come in!" in answer to his knock.

"I am—Hythe!" he called back.

"Oh, come on in then!" came back the answer.

On obeying the injunction, a sweet and idyllic sight presented itself to his eyes. Reclining on a chair, with his feet on the window-seat, was Nugent, solacing himself with a cigarette, while perched on the end of the seat not occupied by that gentleman's feet was the Admirable, also indulging in the same gentle recreation.

It would be difficult to say which of the three appeared most astonished.

The Admirable looked at Nugent for instructions. But as the latter made no effort to take the cigarette from his mouth he felt it beneath his dignity to do so either.

"You look struck, Hythe!" observed Nugent blandly. "Well, you can't be more that way than I am. I thought you said Edwards."

Hythe didn't say anything. But he looked at Nugent's cigarette, and from that to the Admirable's, and his glance was expressive.

"Object to smoking?" Nugent drawled.

"Yes," said Hythe. "Put that cigarette down, Crichton!"

Again the Admirable looked for instructions, and again sat tight.

Now, as a matter of fact, Nugent was not best pleased with the turn of events. The Admirable's being there complicated matters very considerably. Though he was not pulling the younger boy up, just now, it is not to be supposed that he always allowed him to indulge in such pastimes with impunity. Crichton was just as likely to have had his head cuffed for lighting the cigarette as to have been permitted to enjoy it. But Nugent's mode of life would have had to be considerably altered if everything that made it not an ideal example for Crichton to follow, had been suppressed in that youth's presence. And this being the first day of term, and things in consequence being a little slack, Nugent had only gone for him to the extent of a mild "Drop it, you young ruffian!" which the Admirable knew he could disregard.

"Put that cigarette down, Crichton, and go to my study!" repeated Hythe.

He got rather a vicious glance from Nugent. The head of the Hittites was beginning to get angry. "I can look after Crichton!" he said, in the sort of tone he would have used in telling a servant not to presume.

"Seems like it!" said Hythe curtly. "Didn't you hear me, Crichton?"

"Oh, yes, I heard you," said Crichton, in a

voice as much like Nugent's as he could make it. "You said I was to go to your study, didn't you?"

"Yes, and I shouldn't let me say it again, if I were you," Hythe advised. "Because next time it will be the Doctor's."

In spite of himself Crichton looked rather impressed. His glance at his chief for guidance was a shade more disturbed than his previous ones.

Hythe followed his glance. "Best let him do what he's told, Nugent," he said seriously. "I mean what I say. Besides, you and I've got to have it out, too, and we shall do it better alone."

"You're beginning early, Scissors!" remarked Nugent, in mock admiration, but with the anger mounting in his voice.

"I've need to, it seems!" answered Hythe. "Well, Crichton, since you will have it, go——"

"That will do!" said Nugent, rather sharply for him. "Wait outside, Crichton. As Hythe so neatly put it, he and I've got to have this out."

The Admirable strolled out as nonchalantly as he could, with his shoulders almost up to his ears, while Nugent, with his feet still on the window-seat and lazily puffing away at his cigarette, regarded his visitor with a glance that was half insolent, half amused.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked languidly.

"Not yet," answered Hythe. The remark was rather enigmatical, and Nugent took the cigarette out of his mouth for a minute to consider him. He didn't find that Hythe looked happy. Profoundly worried and upset rather—but he was quite at his ease, too, Nugent noticed.

Not being able to arrive at any definite conclusion about his visitor, Nugent resumed operations with the cigarette, blowing little rings out of his mouth, and watching them in indolent enjoyment. The corner of the mantelpiece was quite close to Hythe. He put his elbow on it, and watched Nugent and the little flying rings, for a moment in silence.

"Mind handing me that empty inkstand beside you, Scissors, for an ash-tray?" asked Nugent with charming aplomb.

"You won't need it," Hythe told him.

"Well, you should know, of course!" said Nugent with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "I suppose you think it's very wicked to smoke while you're at school, Scissors?" he asked with an undercurrent of interest beneath the sneer.

"No," said Hythe after reflecting. "Rotten, more, I should say!"

Nugent didn't seem to be making much headway. "Well, for a person who hinted he was on the warpath, you're a long time

coming to the point, don't you think?" he observed impatiently. "I suppose you're going to try and come over me with the same dodge you did the youngster just now?"

"What dodge?" asked Hythe.

"Oh, that if I don't renounce the weed in all its forms—I *have* just looked at a cigar, too, you know, in my time—you'll find it your painful duty to ask me to favour our friend St. George with a call. That's about the hang of it, isn't it?"

"No," said Hythe.

"You surprise me!" murmured Nugent. "May I add, you also relieve me? A coolness has sprung up between St. George and myself of late years, and I don't want the brute's society forced on me more than I can help. Still, as the last resort of a weak rule, I thought that was to be it. Or perhaps you've tumbled to your privileges in the swiping line? But I'm too big for that kind of thing, I'm afraid, Scissors. It wouldn't be considered good form, you know. Besides, I might hit back!"

"Not the cane?" he went on, as Hythe didn't answer. "Then is it lines, to which your fancy goes? But if that is the idea, I may as well tell you, at the start, that I shouldn't do 'em. So we should be no forrader than we are now, as far as I can see."

Hythe slightly shook his head.

"Well then, my Scissors, I'm at the end of my tether," said Nugent, laughing and continuing to smoke. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind taking a turn now, and telling me how you really do mean to put a stopper on my finishing this cigarette. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"I'm going to ask you not to finish it," said Hythe at once.

Nugent stared at him. Whatever he had been expecting, it was certainly not this.

"That all?" he drawled after a minute.

"And you think that will work the trick?"

"Yes," said Hythe, and if the quiet confidence of his tone was put on, he must have been a very finished actor indeed.

"Why?" said Nugent rather quickly.

"Because it would be so—jolly decent—of you not to—just now," Hythe told him. "You see how I'm fixed."

Nugent looked at him attentively. Hythe looked back at him with eyes which were at once courageous and laughing. In that one little utterance he had been bold enough to break down the barriers of pride, and insolence, and mockery, that Nugent had always set up between them, and claim him for the friend he had always known him in his heart to be.

"Well, my reputation seems to have gone

wrong in my old age!" observed Nugent at last. "Who are you getting at? And what do you want, anyway? And why did you come?"

But though Hythe gave him a little affectionate grin, he kept his eye on the cigarette, which the other had taken out of his mouth the better to observe him.

"Oh, well, anything for a quiet life!" said Nugent, pitching it into the empty grate. "What a fellow you are to fuss, Scissors! And now, sit down, my dear chap, and tell us what it is you want?"

Hythe wanted a lot, it seemed. And as he listened, Nugent's eyebrows, arched by nature, curved like a bow. Indeed there seemed no limit to this quiet boy's ambition. To put it plainly, he wanted St. Osyth's to win the cup from Arundel or at least to make a good fight for it. And in the present state of affairs, it was tantamount to wanting the moon.

"Oh, don't think I don't know what a big thing it is," he said now. "Don't think I don't know the awful swot it's going to be for us all. When I sat down in my study, just now, I felt a hundred." He got up as he spoke and rested his elbow on the mantelpiece again, the excitement coursing through his voice, like the blood through a vein.

"But why come to me?" asked Nugent.

"Because you're the chap!" Hythe told him, his voice electric. "You're worth a dozen of the rest of us any day, if you'd only buckle to. Why, it would have been all up with me in the exam. even, if you'd mugged up a bit more. All the same, whether you grind or not, you've got——"

"What?" asked Nugent lazily. He was laughing again at the speaker, though not in the old way. Jove! it did really wake a fellow up, to hear the way old Scissors was talking.

"It!" said Hythe vehemently. He had begun to walk up and down now, his face keen and eager, and his utterance for once rapid. "I can't give it a name. But it's what all the chaps feel about you. You could do pretty well what you liked, if you'd only put your back into it!"

"Really, Scissors!" said Nugent. "I'm not used to these shocks. And my doctor says I'm not to be upset. Do sit down, there's a good chap. You make me tired!"

"Rot!" said Hythe unsympathetically. "You've got to be tired. It'll do you good. Besides, it's nothing to what you will be before you're in good enough form to play Arundel."

"Aren't you taking things rather for granted?" asked Nugent.

"Not a bit of it, old chap," said Hythe coolly. "Now, how about getting up a new committee. Suppose we let the school vote as

usual. Then the school-house and Doctors can stand out, or not, just as they like. I'll stick up a voting paper on the notice board to-night. Oh, and about that *orange wine*, Farquhar says your aunt sends you—hadn't you better let her know that you're not taking any just now?"

"My noble Captain," retorted Nugent, "I don't like your tone. It implies an acquaintance with my domestic affairs to which I object. Still, I don't mind telling you, between ourselves, that oranges being no longer in season, my esteemed relative is about to stop supplies. By the time they're in again this precious match will be over, and you perhaps will have done worrying a chap's life out."

"Oh, well, as long as she does stop 'em!" said Hythe laughing, but with a suggestion in his manner that he wasn't Captain of the team for nothing.

"What about the little beggar outside?" asked Nugent as Hythe got up to go. "I can't have him hammered, you know, for what I didn't stop his doing."

"Of course not," Hythe agreed reasonably. "Still, I should let him come to my study now, if I were you, as I'm going to give him nothing worse than——"

Whatever was to be the Admirable's portion, Nugent didn't seem inclined to show

fight over it, and opening the door he gave that youth his marching orders without more ado. As Hythe had still some points about the voting-paper to discuss with Nugent, the Admirable arrived at the study first. He amused himself, until its owner appeared, by overhauling his bookshelves. He had just settled himself down, in the most comfortable chair he could find, with one of Henty's most thrilling volumes, when Hythe was inconsiderate enough to put in an appearance. The Admirable left off reading with reluctance, although he kept his finger ostentatiously in the page he was at. He didn't offer to get up. But if ever a human countenance glared defiance, the Admirable's glared it then.

"Has Nugent finished jawing you about me?" he enquired as offensively as he could.

"Well, as it happened, we found other subjects of conversation!" Hythe told him. "But I'm coming to you now. You can put that book down. You'll have plenty to do to listen to what I'm going to say."

The Admirable pitched the book—there is no other word for it—violently from him on to a small table near the fireplace. On its passage it brushed against a business-like looking luggage strap, hanging from a nail on the wall. The Admirable's eye being caught by this phenomenon, hung there.

Hythe followed his glance. "I'm not

going to swipe you for smoking to-day—don't be afraid!" he said, the last sentence being added more out of consideration for the Admirable's patent need of being taken down, than because he thought he really was suffering from that emotion.

"Afraid!" Crichton's tone was jeering. "Of you! Why, I'd as soon be afraid of a penny whistle!"

"Well, if you're not getting it for smoking, that doesn't say you won't for cheek!" was Hythe's answer to that. "Get me that strap!"

"Get it yourself!" retorted the Admirable.

"No, you're to get it!" said Hythe patiently, as though he was explaining to an infant or an imbecile.

"Catch me!" answered Crichton.

Hythe looked at him for minute without speaking. Then he said with seeming irrelevance:

"I was going to put you in the Eleven, Crichton!"

"I am in the Eleven!" snapped the Admirable, with a look that added, "so there!"

"*First* Eleven I mean!" said Hythe quietly.

The Admirable's brown face flushed like the sunset. "What, me, Hythe?" he gasped. "Why?"

"We've got to choose another First Eleven. You're one of the least rotten of the Second. That's why!" Hythe answered concisely.

"Am I going to play against Arundel, Hythe?" The Admirable could scarcely get the words out in his excitement.

"*Were* going to play," Hythe corrected.

The Admirable's jaw dropped. "Aren't you going to put me in now, Hythe?" he faltered. And that is no more than the right word to use for anything so agitated, so aching, and so sick as his voice. Any fellow would have felt the same too, if he had had a thing like that taken away, almost before it had been sprung on him.

"Catch me!" answered Hythe, unkindly repeating the Admirable's own classical phrase.

"Why, Hythe?" asked the other almost humbly.

"Because the First Eleven's got to do what it's told," answered Hythe, with what the poet would describe as brevity and instance.

"Oh, I would, Hythe!" pleaded the Admirable.

"Well, suppose we try," said Hythe grimly. "Get me that strap!"

The would-be member of the First Eleven looked into the eyes of the Captain of the

same. Then he walked across the room, got down Hythe's badge of office, and handed it over without a word.

Hythe took it from him and tossed it aside. "Well, I guess twenty lickings wouldn't have made you do that, Admirable!" he said. "And as that's all I wanted to get at, we needn't do any fancy work with it." He looked thoughtfully at the younger boy for a minute and then delivered himself of the following pithy utterances:

"I'll put you in. But there's no need for you to be coxy over it. It's only because the better men are backing out that you've got a look in. And there're other fellows in the Second Eleven, almost up to your form, so if I have any lip from you, out you get!"

"Oh, you won't have, Hythe!" the Admirable assured him eagerly.

"And it won't be such a soft thing as you think, either," warned the other. "You'll play when I like, and how I like, and where I like, mind that! You'll practise at the nets, or you'll rest out, just as I say. And you'll do it without kicking up a dust either."

"Oh, I will, Hythe!" cried the Admirable, including all and every injunction in the promise. "And I won't touch another cigarette, that I swear."

Almost before the word was out of his mouth, Hythe's hand was on his shoulder like

a vice, and he was being swayed to and fro like a pendulum.

"You'd better!" the elder boy warned. "Why, you little fool, if I thought you could as much as remember that the beastly things existed now, I'd flay you alive—or even sling you out of the Eleven. Why, man alive, don't you see it's the chance of your life?"

In spite of that bruising grasp on his shoulder, the speaker's enthusiasm set the Admirable on fire.

"We'll do it, Hythe!" he cried. In his present state of high pressure, he felt he could have accomplished the business single-handed.

The Captain supplied the necessary cold douche. "You'll do *us*, you mean!" he growled, "if your batting doesn't get a precious sight better than it is now. And anyway, instead of gassing, you'd better go and get some prep. done. Because if I find you're booked for the detention room, when you're due for cricket, wishing yourself dead will be a little thing to what you'll feel!"

Assuredly, as Hythe had mentioned at the start, it was not going to be a soft thing. But the Admirable didn't seem to mind. And although he put in some time at his Cæsar, when he might have been occupied in more congenial pursuits, I don't know that any one was any the worse for it.

That very same evening a paper requesting the school to vote for a new cricket committee, appeared on the blackboard. The next morning St. Osyth's found pinned underneath the paper, a little white visiting card on which was written the baleful warning: "Beware!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE STOLEN STAMPS

The voting paper and its mysterious appendage attracted a good many visitors to the board the next day.

"We may as well let them know that they can save themselves the trouble of voting for us, at the start," said Samborne. "Cut off and get me a sheet of paper, one of you kids."

"It is of course," observed Gegechkory, regretfully. "But if you could have partaken of the committee, it would have put a spokesman in his wheel, instead of leaving him the only absolute."

The piece of paper, having been brought on the wings of the wind by the Bleater, privileged to share in so important a transaction, Samborne thereupon scrawled on it in pencil:

"This is to notify that, as with the exception of Edwards and Pease, all members of the First Eleven have withdrawn, no one new is to vote for us for the committee. And no one belonging to the school-house, or Doctor's, is to take our place in the First Eleven either even if he is asked to.

"Here, put your fist to this, will you, Giffard?" said Samborne, handing the paper over to the head of the school-house—for since Farquhar's departure, that was the proud position Giffard had stepped into—to sign.

"Isn't it rather rummy—for a notice?" questioned Giffard dubiously, as he signed. He wasn't really nearly as keen on the business as Samborne seemed to be. But it would have been the height of ingratitude for him to have backed out, considering that it was partly in his interests that the crusade had been undertaken.

Coming out, after first lesson, Hythe had to pass the notice-board, and a path was made for him as if by magic, by the crowds who were waiting to see the effect Samborne's production would have on him. To everyone's surprise, Nugent accompanied him. The school wasn't used to that particular combination yet.

"Shades of Farquhar!" said Nugent, apostrophising Samborne's handiwork. Then his eye falling on the mystic "Beware!" he added languidly, "Think there's a bomb anywhere about, old man?"

Hythe laughed, as he unpinned the little card, and dropped it into his pocket.

"What are you going to do with it, Scissors?" asked a school-house fellow jeeringly.

"Add it to my collection. I keep an album for 'em!" Hythe told him. He looked round the crowd and asked amiably:

"Anyone seen Bunge about? I want to tell him I'm putting him in the First Eleven."

"Haven't you seen the notice on the board?" asked Nugent in a stage whisper.

"Oh, *that*!" said Hythe contemptuously. "Run along and find him, Coughdrop, and tell him I'm waiting for him in the gymnasium."

The interview in the gymnasium left Bunge, without exception, the happiest boy who had ever been at St. Osyth's. The glories of the Debating Society went down with a rush before the new honours that were being heaped upon him. He was to be in the Eleven! He was to play against Arundel!

He was in such a state of beatitude that when a summons came to him to attend Samborne in his study, he obeyed it without the least discomposure. Nor when he found that not only were his own prefects assembled, but a contingent of school-house ones as well, did he appear in my way to mind.

"What did Hythe want you for in the gymnasium, just now?" demanded Samborne sourly. He knew of course. But he wanted to convict Bunge out of his own mouth.

But Bunge liked being convicted. Loved

it, in fact. He even said the words slowly, so as to prolong the beautiful sound.

"I'm in the First Eleven, Samborne. Isn't it ripping!"

"I suppose you've not seen the notice on the board, saying no school-house or Doctor's fellow is to be in it?" asked Samborne.

"Oh, yes, I have, Samborne," answered Bunge, the music of his last utterance still sounding in his ears.

"Well, didn't you understand it, you owl?" enquired his inquisitor savagely.

"Oh, yes, Samborne," answered Bunge "But the Captain's told me I may be in, so that's all right, isn't it?"

"Try him with something he *can* understand, Samborne?" advised Spratt.

In obedience to the suggestion Samborne enquired pithily, "What should you do if I was to hit you, Bunge?"

"Why, hit you back, Samborne," answered Bunge, with simple earnestness. "The Captain said I was to get into training, so it might help me to get my hand in at the start!"

"You'll be sent to Coventry!" Giffard threatened.

"Well, you see, Giffard," Bunge answered almost apologetically, "I'm afraid that wouldn't make much odds to me, just now.

I don't see how I'm to get the time to be very much with any of you. The Captain says I must swot like a nigger from now to the match, and aren't I going to, just!"

"Won't it rather hip you with the Debating Society?" asked Spratt as a last resource.

Bunge opened his honest ox-eyes at him. "Why, you don't suppose I'll be able to run that any longer, do you?" he asked in astonishment. "I shall resign, of course. Is that all you wanted me for, Samborne? Because if you don't mind I think I'd better be going. I want to start putting in some time at the nets at once!"

Since nobody could think of anything else to say, they let him go. A minute or so afterwards Giffard followed his example.

"Where's your hurry?" asked Samborne.

"I want to run down to the village and see Baillie about the new bike I'm getting from him," answered Giffard. "And unless I rush off now, I shan't get back for call-over."

"New bike? Why, has anybody left you a fortune?" they asked in chorus.

The surprise was not uncalled for. Framlingham Abbey, though one of the oldest country seats in England, was also one of the most impoverished, and if Sir Richard was able to scrape up enough to pay for his two young sons' education at St. Osyth's and provide for the requirements of his numerous

feminine progeny, it was as much as he could do. Pocket-money was the last thing that as a rule came Giffard's way.

Still, the latter's interview with the owner of the bicycle shop must have been satisfactory, for a day or two afterwards as Hythe and Nugent were making their way to the playing fields together—St. Osyth's was getting used to both their amalgamation and their usual destination—they met him wheeling a handsome machine up the drive.

"Can you tell me, sirs, where I can leave this bicycle for Master Giffard," he asked civilly.

"If you leave it with the butler or the porter it will be all right," they told him.

"The other young gents won't go playing any tricks with it, will they?" asked the man. He was used to St. Osyth's ways.

"Leave it in Joseph's charge, Baillie, and he will watch over it like a mother," said Hythe laughing, and reassured, Baillie touched his cap and went on.

"Giffard seems to be in funds," said Nugent, and Hythe, running his eye over the departing machine, agreed. He was conscious of a little mild astonishment, even at the time. Having lived for two years with Giffard in the school-house, he knew that hiring a bicycle even, was often a serious consideration with him.

It was about a week later that he made a discovery. And that was that his early Mauritius stamp, the gem of his collection, had vanished from his stamp-album.

It was almost more by accident than anything else that he made the discovery in moving his album from his cupboard to his bookshelf. He was too sick at heart in these days to give much thought to a hobby which brought back so many memories of his father.

The Mauritius was not a perfect specimen, nor was it that rarest one of all which had fetched the extraordinary price. Still, it was a stamp which any collector would have liked to possess, and which Hythe was very proud of. There was a little cockled space in the page of the album where it had formerly reposed, as though it had been carefully steamed off. A hurried glance over the album disclosed other blanks too, in the way of Moroccos and British Columbias. But the loss of these was trifling in comparison with the Mauritius. He looked carefully over the album, to see if there was any sign of the little visiting card, with its fateful message, which had accompanied another, though not so serious a depredation of his property. But this time it was conspicuous by its absence.

The loss was so serious that he did not

take any steps in the matter just at once. He wanted to think the thing well over. But his action was quickened about a week later by a sufficiently startling incident.

It occurred one Wednesday morning, when the Doctor had asked him to breakfast, and by way of conferring an immense treat upon him, had showed him an imperfect early Mauritius stamp, which he had only just purchased and which was evidently the pride of his heart. After gazing at it with a fixedness which must have gratified its owner, Hythe had no difficulty in recognising it for the one which until a short time ago had graced his own album.

"It was a piece of extravagance," the Doctor told him laughingly, and almost like a school-boy who has been convicted of spending his pocket money not wisely, but too well, "but, Paley"—he mentioned the name of a dealer who was Hythe's own—had written to tell him that he had just acquired it, and that it was a real find. "It is a little damaged, of course," continued the Doctor, "or I shouldn't have got it for what I did."

Hythe could have guessed at the approximate price, Mr. FitzHerbert had paid for it, with an accuracy which would have astonished the latter. But he refrained too from pointing out its difficulty of some time comparing it with his own as the Doctor suggested!

On getting back to his study, he wrote off at once to Paley, asking him if he would kindly tell him how he came into possession of the early Mauritius stamp just purchased by Mr. FitzHerbert. Paley, writing back by return, supplied the information that it had been sold to him by a young gentleman named Giffard, who had made an appointment with him a couple of weeks since to arrange for its purchase along with a couple of Moroccos and a British Columbia, at a confectioner's in the same village, in which, curiously enough, the school of their present client was situated. Hythe tore that letter into tiny fragments, so that not a trace of the shameful evidence should be left in the world.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE TRACK OF THE BROTHERHOOD

Bunge was not the only member of the school-house and Doctor's, to whom Hythe offered colours in the course of the next few days. But he was the only one who had the courage to accept them. Hythe didn't press the point. But when they would have entered into shame-faced explanations, he cut them short with a curt "Well, it's your loss!" which was too sickeningly true for retort. As for the Middle School of both houses, their feeling towards the Admirable was one of pure unmitigated envy. "If him, why not us?" they inwardly breathed. But they forgot that in addition to his height, which made him look almost like a senior, there were cricketing possibilities in the Admirable's play which, now that he had been made to take the thing up seriously, opened up some rather remarkable speculations.

Between ourselves, it did sometimes begin to dawn on the original First Eleven that it had, so to speak, cut off its nose to spite its face. But how its members laughed when they discovered the names of their successors.

There were Nugent, Edwards, Pease, the Admirable and a Fifth-form fellow named Marshall from the Hittites, Bunge from the school-house, and Malet, Curwen, Phillpott, Ogle, and Hythe himself, from Yaeger's. Could anyone but a lunatic think of taking the field with a scratch lot like that, against the pick of Arundel?

Ogle's appearance among the Eleven was something of a surprise. In these later days he had been very much like a fish out of water. The members of his own house, whom he had so cold-shouldered at the time that the Classics, for their own ends, had pretended to take him up, seemed now inclined to pay back his treatment in kind. Then his quarrel with Hythe, and the fact that Yaeger's appeared always to be either with that gentleman or wanting him, still further increased his loneliness. There were other things, too, which, when he dared to let himself think about them, weighed on his spirits. As indeed they might well.

"I've put you down for the First Eleven, Ogle!"

The voice was Hythe's, and it seemed to Ogle, as he stood disconsolately playing racquets by himself, for want of something better to do, that it was the first friendly sound he had heard for years.

But he was too awkward to know how to

accept the advance, although he was longing to.

"I don't know that I want to be in," he returned ungraciously.

"What rubbish, old chap!" laughed Hythe, in a cordial sort of way, that Ogle, in his present state of depression, couldn't stand out against. "We want you in, anyway. So come out of your sulks, and we'll get to work."

But though Ogle agreed, he still looked uncomfortable. Perhaps he had his reasons.

How Hythe did sweat that wretched First Eleven of his, in those days, to be sure. But as Gegechkory had said, although he had used another substantive, "if ever he see a leader in his life, he was him." That first enthusiasm of his, instead of burning itself out, kept up a steady flame. He knew when to speak and when to be silent, and to make either accomplishment equally painful for slackers. But he was just as ready, too, to hearten them up, when their spirits drooped under the weight of the task they had undertaken. He played a good, steady game himself, without his play being, as Samborne had told him, anything to shout about. But he knew exactly how much better men than himself could do. And he also saw that they did it.

Nugent was the most difficult of the team

to drive, by a long way. If he happened to be in the mood, no one could touch him, and any captain would have thanked his stars that Heaven had vouchsafed him such a treasure. But then it so often happened that he wasn't in the mood! And as Hythe wasn't going to take any risks of that kind, with such a big thing on, he made it, at this time, the principal business of his life to get Nugent to play up to concert pitch, whether he felt like it or not. Still, and it says a good deal for the worth of it, Nugent's friendship for him survived the treatment.

The first time that Hythe had fixed up an early morning practice, he gave Crichton rather definite instructions about waking Nugent up.

"Six o'clock, Nugent!" said the Admirable, according to orders.

"Why didn't you tell me that before, you lazy toad," asked Nugent, calmly turning on his side, and going to sleep again.

Two minutes afterwards the Admirable popped in his head again. "I've turned your bath water on, Nugent!" he observed.

"Eh, what?" said Nugent, opening sleepy eyes. "Then turn it off again, you young fool!"

"Please, Nugent, Hythe said I wasn't to—not even if it overflowed the bath!" was the staggering response.

Now, the friction with the authorities which such a catastrophe would inevitably bring about was not the sort of thing that any head of any house could have risked with impunity. Still, by the time that Nugent had dived for his slippers, and flung them after the Admirable's retreating form, and gone to the bath-room to turn off the tap, he was sufficiently wide awake to think a tub not such a bad idea, after all. And in spite of everything, he showed up on the ground in a better temper than might have been expected.

With all this glory flying about, both for the Hittites and Yaegers, the juniors of both houses didn't see why they should not try to catch a little for themselves. They chose to ignore their old alliance with the school-house and Doctor's against the Moderns. They chose to forget, too, that the very members of the First Eleven, on whose possession they were now preening themselves, really belonged to the despised race. But indeed, as used as a term of opprobrium, the word "Modern" was almost dropping out of use.

"Our house has got five chaps in the Eleven? How many has yours?" asked Ayscough, of *malice prepense*, to Giffard minor.

The school-house junior wriggled. "Don't

you know our house has given the Eleven the go-bye?" he asked, as grandly as he could.

"Sour grapes!" retorted Mothersole aggravatingly. "You don't suppose if any chap could be in the First Eleven he wouldn't be, you luney, do you?"

It took some supposing, certainly. "Any way, we've got one—Bunge!" cut in Sandford, as one who would say, "And by this remnant are we saved!"

How pleased his own seniors would have been to hear him! But it might have afforded them an instructive object lesson as to the school's real feelings, towards that high-handed withdrawal of theirs.

On the next early-morning practice neither Nugent nor Bunge turned up exactly to time. But as Rome wasn't built in a day, Hythe didn't expect punctuality of Nugent yet, and in his case thought nothing of it—indeed he was rather glad of his absence, as things turned out afterwards. But with Bunge he realised that something not far short of an earthquake must have occurred to keep him back. Consequently he didn't slang him when he finally appeared, but waited patiently for the explanation.

"I was sleeping in A. dormitory in our house, last night," began Bunge, who was out of breath, and had evidently been running

—"in place of Grant—he's in the sick-room, you know, and when I went to my study this morning, I found it ragged!"

"Ragged!" repeated the others.

"Yes," answered Bunge ruefully. "There isn't a thing that isn't upset or smashed or something. My novels and photos are torn to bits, and somebody's had his hoof into my collection of bird's eggs."

"Rough luck!" went round.

"Yes, it made me sick, I can tell you, when I first clapped eyes on it," agreed Bunge. "But photographs, and eggs, and things, are an awful fag to look after, when a chap's up to his eyes in other things, like I am now. So I'm not going to worry myself over it. Well bowled!" he screeched, observing a swift ball of Malet's that almost got the Admirable out. "Oh, and by the way," he added, coming back to earth again. "I found this card pinned to my table. It says 'Beware.' Rummy sort of object, isn't it?"

"Do you think it was a *brotherly* sort of thing to do, Bunge—to rag your room, I mean?" Hythe asked, his eye on Bunge's face.

But the latter in his innocent bewilderment at the question, and his desire to answer it fittingly, looked like nothing so much as an anxious turnip.

"Well, no, Hythe," he answered, after

giving the matter his best consideration. "I should think it was the other way up, shouldn't you?"

Hythe laughed, and acquitted Bunge in his own mind of having any nefarious dealings with any Secret Society whatsoever. The vengeance of the Brotherhood had alighted this time, not on one of its own members, but on a private person, who had managed to offend them. It was their way of taking it out of Bunge for his temerity in having joined the Eleven. The mouth of the Captain of that body tightened down, as he took the little card from Bunge and dropped it in his pocket. His collection appeared to be growing.

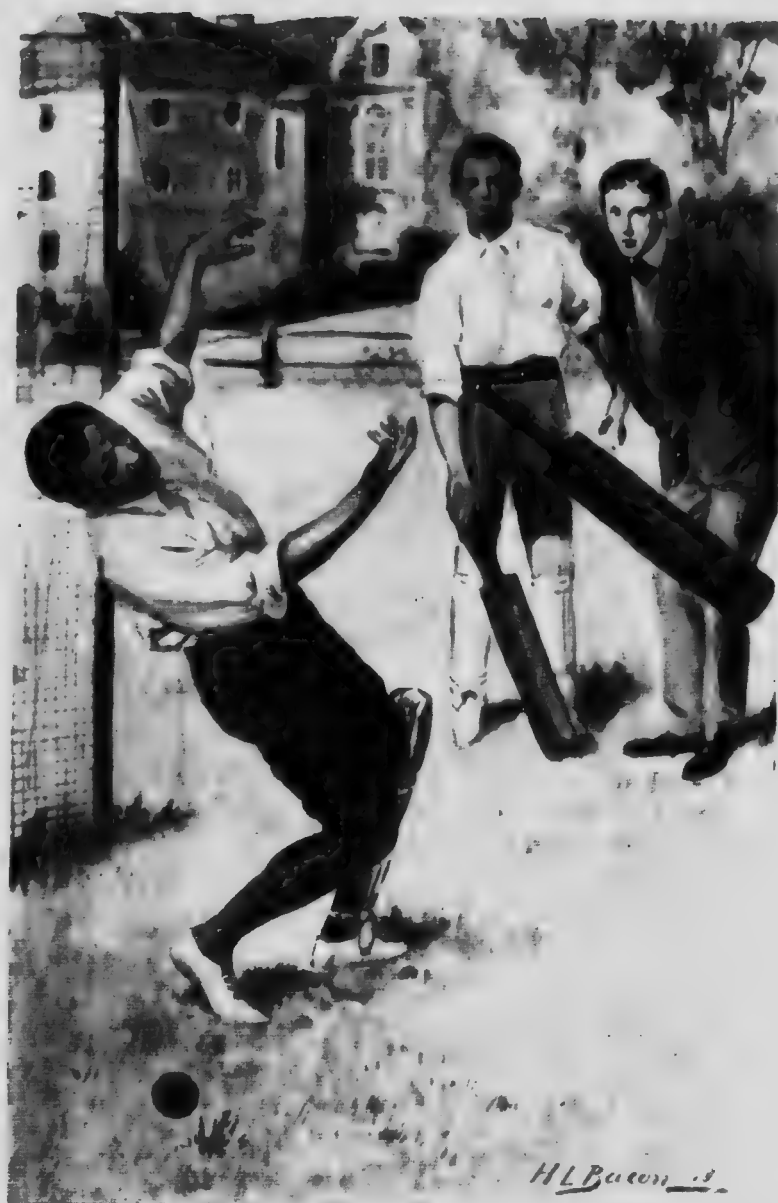
"Whoever's done it shall pay for it, Bunge, I promise you," he said. "But do you mind lying low about it for a day or two?"

"Of course I don't mind, Hythe," said Bunge. "Bowled, sir!" he screamed again at another of Malet's balls.

But if Bunge was enthusiastic about Malet's bowling, Hythe was actuated by quite different sentiments about the Admirable's batting. He was strangely off his play this morning, surely? And even as he thought it, he saw the boy get his leg in front of the next ball, and go down like a ninepin.

He was biting his lips to hide the pain as Hythe got up, and his face was sickly.

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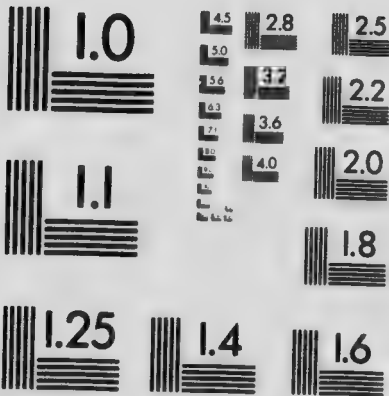


"He saw the boy go down like a ninepin."



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"I'm all right!" he said. But as he nearly fainted off, in the effort to bring the words out, they got rather anxious.

Adjoining the field and at the side on which they were standing, was the old Doctor's empty motor-garage. "Let's get him in there out of the sun," said Hythe, "and see the damage."

But the patient, when he recovered sufficiently to see where he was being taken, seemed singularly ungrateful for their attention. "I bar going into that mucky hole!" he said, struggling and protesting.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" asked Hythe, astonished. He had got the door open by this time, and without taking any more notice of the Admirable's protests than if he had been a fly, he laid him down on the bench which ran along one side of the wall, and drew up the leg of his flannels.

There was a nasty bruise on the Admirable's shin where the ball had struck it. But it was by no means alone in its glory. As Hythe drew down his sock, too, he began to understand why a healthy little animal like the Admirable had crocked up so easily just now.

"Don't!" said the Admirable. His tone was almost imploring.

"All right!" said Hythe and stopped the peeling process. He sent the others out to

finish the game, saying that there was nothing much the matter, and that he would stop with the Admirable until he'd pulled himself sufficiently together to walk home. And it wasn't until they were quite alone that he asked:

"Anyone been booting you, Admirable?"

"No," said Crichton promptly.

That sort of lie was quite allowable, of course, even praiseworthy, and Hythe had expected it.

"Sure?" he repeated. "Well, it rather looks to me as though someone had been claiming a *brother's* privileges!"

The shot which had missed fire in Bunge's case went home here. Crichton's white face went even whiter. "I don't know what you're driving at," he blustered.

"Drop it!" said Hythe. "So you're one of that crew!"

"What crew?" asked Crichton, valiant to the last.

"It's no good, Admirable," Hythe warned him. "But there must have been a good many of 'em at it, to have mauled you like that, for I don't suppose you took it sitting down. Was it for being in the Eleven?"

Crichton shut his lips.

"Never mind," said Hythe. "I can pretty well guess. I'm not going to ask you to give them away. But you've got to answer

what I say now, because it's your own show. Were you at that first meeting when I said the filthy business had got to stop ? "

" Yes, Hythe," answered Crichton.

" Well, I meant it, you know," Hythe told him. " But as they seem to have worked off a good deal of steam on you, I shan't take you on again. But don't go pitying yourself. Because you'd have had to have had it, you know, sometime. And if it crocks you up for the match, you've only yourself to blame. If you hadn't been as stiff as a poker, you'd never have got in the way of that ball ! "

" Are you going to tell Nugent, Hythe ? " asked the Admirable, flouncing round so that his face was away from Hythe.

" No," said Hythe, " I'm not. Nugent m yn't pull you up sharp enough for things like cigarettes, but if he thought you'd been mixing yourself up in a dirty underhand show like this, he'd be ready to drop you ! "

The Admirable looked so purely wretched at the mere suggestion that Hythe relented a little, and on Nugent, who had just strolled on to the ground, coming in to see how the Admirable was getting along, he good-naturedly suggested that as the hour was so late he would perhaps debar himself from practising for once, and see the Admirable home instead. And in spite of the dressing-down he had treated Crichton to in the

garage, he brought him a bottle of embrocation during the course of the day, and doctored up his knee for him. In consequence the Admirable didn't feel that active hatred of him one might have supposed.

He stayed for a moment or two in the garage, after the pair had left. Crichton's manifest reluctance to enter it, combined with certain furtive looks he had cast round, had put an idea into Hythe's head. It had been unused since the old Doctor's time, but certainly, now Hythe looked at it, its dusty floor did really seem as if it had been trodden by a good many feet lately. Had the Brotherhood been using it for their meetings, and was the Admirable's desire to keep him out of it, just now, dictated by the fear that any incriminating signs of their presence had been left behind? He remembered Gegechkory's predilection for unholy hours. And since he had taken to shedding those little visiting cards of his round, it was reasonable to suppose that he would choose a meeting-place that wouldn't be easily raided. And the difficulty of bolts and bars once overcome, this unused garage, lighted only by the roof, offered an almost ideal security. Hythe strolled out nonchalantly for the benefit of any members of the Society who might happen to be observing his movements but all the same he took the precaution to

slip the key into his pocket. He hadn't any definite plan of action. But a key was always a useful weapon. It was a case in which he would have liked to take Nugent into his confidence. But though the Brotherhood's ways were not such as to merit any sort of consideration from anybody, he was still bound by that old promise of his, not to divulge their existence to the authorities. But they were piling up a heavy reckoning for themselves, on the day when he should take them single-handed.

An incident which occurred about this time strengthened Hythe's position, not only with Yaeger's, but with the school at large. It was in connection with the swimming.

The river Wythe, in which St. Osyth's was used to disport itself in the summer term, although dignified by that name, was in reality little more than a stream. Still, at a certain point, it widened out sufficiently to make it a quite respectable bathing-place. It was really some distance from the school, but by taking a short cut across Farmer Baker's fields, it was possible to reach it in less than ten minutes. St. Osyth's had always availed themselves of this short cut. Judge then the indignation of Ayscough and his friends, on sallying forth one fine morning, to find the stile they had to cross rendered as difficult as human ingenuity could make it,

with brambles and barbed wire. They would not have let themselves be done by these, of course, had not Farmer Baker, and Farmer Baker's dog, added to the entrenchments.

The farmer, ostentatiously enjoying his pipe, pointed to a board with "Trespassers will be Prosecuted" printed upon it, in fierce black letters, without troubling himself to utter a word.

"But we've always used it, Mr. Baker," they expostulated.

"Well, yeou've used ta for the last time," Mr. Baker told them in his broad accent. "An' ye dew so no more I'll ha' the law 'a you. Be off of yew."

"But it's half an hour longer the other way, Mr. Baker!" protested the little boys.

"So 'tis!" agreed Mr. Baker. "But yeou've young legs!"

There didn't seem anything further to be said. And the little boys, breathing futile vengeance, had to return to St. Osyth's unbathed.

"How about telling Hythe?" Ayscough suggested tentatively.

"Why, what could he do?" enquired Giffard minor. Before this tragic episode, the juniors tacitly agreed to sink all feuds of clan.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Ayscough modestly, as though he was spe king of his own possession. "But he's captain, you

know. And he seems to get there, somehow."

"Well, if you think it would be any good," agreed Giffard minor desperately, "I'd do *anything*, you know."

When Ayscough ushered himself and his friends into the Captain's study, they found him both kind and obliging. He threw away his cares of state at once, and listened to them in the nicest way.

"It'll be an awful fag, Hythe, having to do that half hour's walk, there and back," said Ayscough.

"So it will, young 'un. We shall have to fix Mr. Baker out, somehow," Hythe agreed.

"What about breaking his windows, Hythe?" suggested Giffard minor hopefull,

The Captain wheeled round on him, and before he knew where he was, the speaker found himself saying in a great fluster:

"We won't, of course, if you don't want us to, Hythe."

"Well, as I'm not anxious to have any more work on my hands, that's a good thing!" returned the Captain. He didn't say what sort of work, but they divined it. "Besides," he continued more good-naturedly, "what do you want to go putting yourself in the wrong for, you little owl? It's Mr. Baker we've got to put in the wrong. I don't see my way just yet, but I'll think it out, and do what I can for you."

The news ran round the school like wild-fire. The whole place was in commotion. Every St. Osythian, big or little, was up in arms. And while they were all breathing vengeance, and cudgelling their brains how to score off their enemy, old Joseph put the very weapon into Hythe's hand.

In pursuance of his promise to the little boys, Hythe had gone straight to Joseph as the oldest inhabitant so to speak, to institute enquiries.

"The school's always used that short cut, hasn't it, Joseph?" he asked.

"Always, Master Hythe," answered Joseph, who was swelling with the school's wrongs. "But that Baker, he be so ill-conditioned. A nasty, grasping nature, as ever I see. Why, he built his very house, as you might say, on a right of way that belonged to the village. And him, with as nice an old lady for his mother as you'd see in a day's march!"

"On a right of way? Are you certain, Joseph?" asked Hythe quickly.

"Certain sure, Master Hythe," answered Joseph huffily. "But if you doubt my word, you can ask Lawyer Jenkins."

Though the advice had been offered in sarcasm, Hythe took it. He cut over on his bike to the lawyer's office the minute second lesson was over. And he there learned that Joseph's information was sub-

stantially correct, with the exception that it was the lawn in front of the farmer's windows, and not the house itself, that occupied the site of the right of way. Lawyer Jenkins was quite pleased to offer the young gentleman any information on the subject he might desire, since Farmer Baker, being of a litigious turn of mind, that made him a little mine of wealth to any lawyer, was so misguided as to employ Lawyer Jenkins' rival. That matter of the right of way was all forgotten now, although there had been a good deal of talk about it at the time, and some grumbling, Lawyer Jenkins said. But as Mr. Baker owned half the cottages, and employed half the labourers in the village, no open objection had been raised. The farmer had certainly the right to refuse St. Osyth's the short cut through his fields, but on the other hand, added Lawyer Jenkins, with a wicked smile, he had no more right to his own lawn than the young gentlemen themselves.

"Like to come for a walk with me, Coughdrop?" asked Hythe, casually, of his little fag. For fortune which favours the brave, had considerately timed Mr. Baker's latest manifestation against the school, to the Wednesday half holiday.

"Oh, yes, Fythe," answered Ayscough, at once. He had had other plans for the after-

noon, but an invitation of this kind, from the Captain of the school, wasn't to be lightly rejected.

"As we may put in a little visit to Farmer Baker on our way, you can bring a few of your pals with you, if you like," Hythe added graciously.

Ayscough accepted the permission so literally that by the time Hythe was ready to start he found almost the whole of the Lower School prepared to accompany him. But he must have been in an accommodating frame of mind, for he only laughed.

"Now, let's get it clear before we start, young 'uns," he said. "I've brought you out for a walk. Understand that. There's to be no skylarking. You're taking a constitutional for the benefit of your health. And if you should happen to think Mr. Baker's got rather a buck lawn, there's nothing to prevent your enjoying it."

It was evidently going to be a great day for the Lower School. And though a few of them in their own hearts may have felt secret tremors, Hythe, with his hands in his pockets, and his straw hat perched at the back of his head, strolling along with the easy, happy smile of a person out for a holiday, was certainly a reassuring sort of leader to follow.

Now, Farmer Baker's mother, whose equal

as Joseph had said, . as not to be met with in a day's march, was a sweet and apple-checked old dame, as unlike her truculent son as could well be. The latter always referred to her as "the owd lady," and in spite of all his surly ways, had a very soft spot in his heart for her. It was "the owd lady's" custom, every afternoon when the day was fine, to have her work-table and her easy-chair, brought ov on to the lawn, there to take a nap, or to knit socks for her burly offspring. The sight of the dear old soul, with her white curls and her sweet, placid old face, was an upset to Hythe. Nothing more disturbing to his plans could have happened.

He stayed his little band. "See that chair," he asked, with a nod in the old lady's direction. "Well, the chap I catch within twenty yards of it, I'll pack off some, with something to remember. But hep over the wall now, and try and fancy you're at church parade."

Though he gave the chair as wide a berth as he could, Hythe was obliged to pass it. In doing so, he politely raised his cap. So did Ayscough. So did Mothersole and the rest. So that it almost seemed as though "the owd lady" was receiving an ovation. And astonished as she must have been at this invasion of her premises, she smiled back at them, in a way that suggested that Mr.

Baker must have inherited his manners from his paternal relative.

Mr. Baker himself had watched the interruption of the enemy from his dining-room windows, with eyes almost starting out of his head. The next instant, he was out on the lawn through the French windows, with his dog at his heels, waving his arms, and shooing them off, as if they had been so many chickens.

"Hie! Yeou've noo business here!" he shrieked.

"We know that, Mr. Baker," answered Hythe, smiling at him engagingly. "We're here for pleasure!"

"Pleasure! Upon my wud!" exclaimed Mr. Baker, every hair on his head appearing to bristle up with rage. "It's come tew summet with yew young college gents, that a body carn't even read a's newspaper i' peace, without finding a mort a' yeow, trapaseing across a's lawnd!"

"Oh, but go on with your newspaper, pray, Mr. Baker!" answered Hythe, graciously. "We shan't mind!"

This was more than flesh and blood could stand. "Hie, Towser! At 'um, boy!" he cried.

Towser responded to the appeal, only to be received on the point of Hythe's toe, in a way that sent him back yelping to his master.

"Why did yeou dew that, yew young whelp?" enquired Mr. Baker, apparently hurt in his feelings. "The pore beast wur only sniffing yeou!"

"Well, you didn't expect me to wait till he'd sniffed a piece out of me, Mr. Baker, did you?" retorted Hythe.

Mr. Baker waived the question. "What a' plague are yeou doing here?" he demanded, not quite unreasonably, perhaps.

Hythe stared at him in astonishment. "Isn't this a public thoroughfare?" he asked in artless bewilderment. "I thought it was a right of way!"

Mr. Baker changed his countenance. "Well, it een't!" he said.

"Oh, I think you'll find you're mistaken, sir," answered Hythe in a courteous desire to set him right. "Just ask Lawyer Jenkins, and you'll see!"

"I'll see as yeou gets a stick 'crost your back in anuther minute!" retorted Mr. Baker disappearing within.

"Keep moving!" said Hythe to his followers, as with his hands still in his pockets, he continued to saunter up and down the lawn. And as well as they could, they followed his example, although the appearance of a couple of farm labourers, armed with pitch-forks, a minute or two afterwards, wasn't the most cheering sight in the world.

"Noo thin, are yeou going to git, or are ye going tew wait till the bors ha' jammed yeou i' the legs, with them there pitch-furruks?" enquired Mr. Barker ferociously.

"Well, neither, Mr. Baker, if it's all the same to you," answered Hythe, in a tone whose suavity was in striking contrast to the farmer's own, "and I shouldn't advise the gentlemen with you to come much nearer, unless they particularly like the feel of a pocket-pistol," here he took a small object from his pocket, and pointed it in a disagreeably business-like way at the advancing pair. Their movements in consequence having come to a sudden stop, he continued blandly:

"I shouldn't like you to think I was gassing, Mr. Baker. But in the interests of your friends, I think I ought to tell you that I do quite a thriving trade with the cocoanuts I come in for, from shooting galleries, and that when ginger-beer bottles are the targets, my path is strewn with broken glass. And a leg"—here the speaker pointed the pistol meditatively at that part of the nearest gentleman's anatomy—"ought to be a jolly sight easier mark than a ginger-beer bottle any day."

"Why arn't yeou jamming 'um, bors?" squealed Mr. Baker, prancing with rage.

"'Coos we carn't git tew 'um!" answered

the body-guard, who had evidently come to the conclusion that they should *not* like the feel of a pocket-pistol.

"By gom! But I'll ha' the lawyer on y3ou!" the farmer bellowed to his enemies.

"Before putting yourself to any expense in the matter, Mr. Baker, I should just talk to Mr. Jenkins if I were you," advised Hythe, in thoughtful consideration for the farmer's interests. "He seemed to think you couldn't, you know!"

The farmer bit his lip. This sweetly smiling young gentleman seemed armed at all points.

For the space of a quarter of an hour Hythe and his now adoring followers promenaded up and down the farmer's cherished turf. For the space of a quarter of an hour the farmer anathematized them, in language that added to their vocabulary, though his "bors," taking good care not to come too near, made showy, but ineffectual lunges with the "pitch-furruks." And for the space of a quarter of an hour "the owd lady," with a humorous twinkle in her eye, smiled indulgently on them all.

"Well," said Hythe, at last, with a gentle sigh, "the best of friends must part, mustn't they, Mr. Baker? Still, we shall always be dropping in on you—till you let us use that short cut again, you know!"

On passing Mrs. Baker, Hythe again raised his hat, and his companions followed suit, and again the old lady smiled in gratified pleasure at the homage. But she got up this time, and with the slightest movement of her little frail hand, beckoned the truculent farmer to her. Strange to say, he came at once.

"Now stop your nonsense, dew, Thomas," she said, but tolerantly, as though she was speaking to a little boy. The farmer's pronunciation was softened in her case, and the lilt she gave to her sentences was quite musical. "And think shame tew yourself for stopping the dear lil' laddies going 'crost the fields if they've a mind tew, an' them behaving so pretty to me. An' yew dew so no more, yew an' me'll have words!"

To listen to the little old lady, who the burly Mr. Baker could have blown away at a breath! But perhaps, knowing what he did about that right of way, and finding Lawyer Jenkins in the business, he was glad of an excuse for getting out of the affair with dignity. Or perhaps the "pretty" behaviour of the young gentlemen to the "owd lady" had not been quite without its effect on him either.

"Well, mother, yeou wull ha' you way, I suppose," he said, with sulky acquiescence.

Mrs. Baker couldn't very well have patted his head, as she had done in his juvenile days, since she now by no means came up to her tall son's shoulder, but that was the effect of the approving look she gave him.

"And now, sir," she said, with a sweet and homely courtesy to Hythe, "my son and me will be honoured if you'll stay and take some cake and home-made ginger beer with us."

After their promenade in the sun, the young gentlemen found the invitation an enticing one, and Hythe accepted for them with alacrity. The refreshments were served on the battlefield, and partook of the nature of a picnic. And exercise having sharpened their appetites, the guests did more than justice to the fare.

Mr. Baker, however, did not join in the festivities. But he watched them from afar without a protest, and rather as though he liked to see Hythe helping "the owd lady" to cut the cakes, and persuading her to join them in the ginger beer.

The only remark he permitted himself was when his guests were on the point of departure.

"Well, young jarntleman, ye've bested me," he said. "But what would that new master o' yars, say tew yew, if so bein'

as I wur tew let out about that there firearm?"

"Well, not much, Mr. Baker," said Hythe laughing, and showing the instrument in question, as he spoke. "Because its nothing worse than a joiner's pencil. But I knew you wouldn't spot it, at that distance, f I held it the right way!"

"Well I'm——" said Mr. Baker. But he glanced at "the owd lady" and forbore to complete the sentence.

A couple of weeks later there came a monstrous hamper of strawberries to St. Osyth's, with Mrs. Baker's compliments and hoping the young gentlemen would accept them, which the young gentlemen very willingly did. And later on there were raspberries, so fat and round that Mr. Baker could have used them as thimbles for his middle finger, because Mrs. Baker knew "what dear lil' laddies liked.

But by this time Mrs. Baker had become an institution at St. Oysth's, and it was odd if on half holidays you didn't find a little group of St. Osyth's young gentlemen partaking of ginger beer with her in the garden, or when the days were cooler, being regaled to high tea in the cheery farm-house kitchen.

For Hythe, she always retained an especial weakness, and I can see "the owd lady

now, in her lavender gown, and black silk apron, with a cap of the finest lace money could purchase—Mr. Baker with all his faults saw to that—perched at a coquettish angle on her curls, making much of him, and looking as more people than her churlish son may have thought "a pictur'."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DAY OF RECKONING

For the next three evenings, although Hythe extinguished his light at the regulation hour, he neither undressed nor went to bed until twelve o'clock. Although he could not see the garage from his study window, he could still obtain an excellent view of anyone who might be minded to make a midnight pilgrimage there, from his own house.

On the third night, his hearing being sharpened to the acutest pitch, he fancied he heard stealthy footsteps passing along the corridor, and down the stairs. A minute or two later, watching intently from his window, he saw a dark figure glide out from the porch and disappear into the night. Following it, he discovered that the front door was open and that whoever was responsible for the fact had prevented it from closing again, on its own account, by the simple expedient of turning the key in the lock. Had a burglar been taking his walk abroad, he might have found the arrangement rather an ideal one. But the gentleman on his way to a meeting of the Brotherhood could scarcely be expected

take into account trifling contingencies of that kind.

There was not a moonbeam to shed its misty light along Hythe's path, as he made his way to the garage. Making sure that Gegechkory would, at least, have posted a sentinel to give notice of the approach of the ty-r-rant or his emissaries, he made a detour round by the racquet courts and the stables, so that he approached it from behind. But a careful scrutiny disclosed that no precaution of this kind had been taken, and that nothing in the world was needed to take the whole of the Brotherhood red-handed, but to slip the key in the lock and turn it. This Hythe proceeded to do, with all swiftness and despatch. The murmur of voices inside died down abruptly. Someone seemed to be trying the door. Hythe banged at it sharply with his hand.

"You there, Ge-ge?" he called.

There was an instant's hesitation, and then Gegechkory in a voice which was husky, with sentiments one can guess at, gibbered:

"Yes, I am. Let me out you—you——"

Hythe didn't wait for him to find the suitable word. "I'm not going to let you out till morning," he said, "or at any rate not until it's light enough for me to nip you. You couldn't break the door open if you tried for a week, and you'd come an awful cropper if

you did a drop from the roof, even if you could get there. But you can sing out for help, of course, and I jolly well hope you will, because then it'll be the Doctor's show instead of mine!"

It was remarkable how suddenly the vigour of Gegechkory's expletives seemed to abate.

Through the long vigil he kept outside through the night, Hythe didn't speak a single word to his prisoners. But the Brotherhood seemed to be having a lot to say, judging by the sounds of recrimination that were every now and then wafted to his ears. But with the first streak of daylight he fetched a ladder from the stable, climbed on to the roof, and coolly broke one of the skylights. This was the more unfortunate, as the Brotherhood, acting on Gegechkory's suggestion, had just got into the best position for rushing him, the moment they should hear his key turn in the lock.

At the sounds of breaking glass they looked up startled. And the next instant they saw Hythe with a face on him like the nether millstone, gazing at them through the aperture he had just made.

"I thought that would be your game," he said curtly. "That's why I wanted to get at your names first. Ah!" the exclamation came out sharply as he caught sight of Giffard and Ogle among the band.

There were fourteen Brothers, all told, imprisoned in the garage. Hythe looked them over and then tabulated their names aloud, while the wretched owners, listened, unable to help themselves.

"Sixth Form—Gegechkory, Giffard, Ogle. Fifth Form—Churton, Upton. Middle School—Marriott, Whitbread, Wallace, Goring, Bridges, Younghusband, Smith, Potter, Underwood." The Captain went over the names slowly, thoroughly, carefully. He might have been adding up accounts.

"Now I'm coming to let you out," he said. His face disappeared and they heard him descending the ladder. The next instant, he had turned the key in the lock and walked in amongst them.

Like a flash Gegechkory was at the door, with his back towards it. Hythe shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the good of that, now I know your names?" he said contemptuously.

"We can hit you," Gegechkory answered pithily.

"And I can report you to the Doctor," Hythe retorted.

"So you will break your swear! And your word of pledge honour, where is it?" asked Gegechkory.

"Where it always was," said Hythe shortly. "I shan't mention the Brotherhood

in my report—don't be afraid. I shall simply say I caught you in the garage at half past twelve at night. And it's just possible St. George will be inquisitive enough to want to know the reason why."

"What are you going to do about it really, though," asked Giffard, his jolly face more disturbed than Hythe had ever seen it.

"With you three seniors?" returned Hythe. "I don't know. I haven't thought. I can't think. With the others there're things like swipings and lines I can give them, and that they'll get up to the knocker. But there's nothing I can do to suit your book, as far as I can see. Perhaps they counted on the seniors being white men."

"Here, I say, draw it mild, you know," exclaimed Giffard, flushing angrily.

Hythe didn't listen to him. But he turned to the others, and said in a voice whose hardness matched his face,

"I've told you once for all what I think of this beastly Brotherhood of yours. I needn't repeat it. I said if you didn't drop it you'd have to pay for it. Well, you haven't dropped it. So you'd better show up in my study directly after second lesson. I don't mean you Ge-ge, or you Ogle, or you Giffard."

"But I say, Hythe, you know——"
Giffard was beginning.

Hythe ignored him pointedly. "Unless

you want to be nabbed by the servants, you'd better cut back, now," he said to the others. "I suppose you can get in by the same way you got out. I'll leave the door as I found it, Ogle," and without troubling himself to see whether they followed his advice or not, he turned on his heel.

The next morning at the appointed hour the wretched eleven made their appearance. There was no necessity this time to trouble anyone to get down the strap. Hythe had it ready to his hand. And his big chair was ranged up conveniently for the execution. Everything, including himself, seemed very unfeeling and business-like.

"Is it to be me or the Doctor?" he said coldly. "Please yourselves, you know,"

"You, Hythe," they said, though with an air of beginning to doubt the wisdom of their choice.

The Captain nodded. "Were all of you at that first meeting," he asked.

"Yes, Hythe," they said again.

"Well, that'll save us a lot of trouble," said Hythe, taking up the strap. "We know where we are and can get to business. Churton, I'll take you on first, as you're the biggest. Bend over this chair!"

Churton arranged himself gingerly. Hythe firmly bettered that arrangement, and then did the best he knew for him with the

luggage-strap. Upton got it next, and then Goring, and so on in orderly procession through the ranks, until Whitbread or "Whitebait," as he was called among his fellows, the smallest Brother of them all, had been wiped off. Hythe's wrist must have ached, although unhappily for his victims he wasn't in the habit of sparing himself in a good cause. And this perhaps is the point to note that for the space of a fortnight, at least, the Captain's visitors that morning refrained from bathing, and mindful of St. Osyth's chaff, endeavoured to perform their more serious ablutions as far from the madding crowd as possible.

"Faugh!" said Hythe when it was done. He threw the strap away from him as if it sickened him. But that the pity was for himself, and not for them, was demonstrated by the fact that he proceeded to give them lines, to an extent which made them look at him dazedly, and that rendered that summer term the most sedentary of their lives. After which, and with half a dozen stinging sentences, from the gist of which they gathered that they were marked men, and that if anything of an unutterably caddish, un-English, un-sporting, low, and abominable nature occurred in the school, its Captain would know whom to suspect, he dismissed them. By that time, anything that was left

of the Brotherhood you might have put into a thimble.

Hythe threw up the window as they left, and flung himself weariedly, with his hands behind his head, on to his window seat. He had certainly had enough exercise, to say nothing of his sleepless night, to engender the feeling, but it appeared to be more mental than physical with him. What to do with Giffard was what was really bothering him. At the rate that youth was going on, it seemed highly improbable that Hythe would be able to continue the policy of shielding him, which he had so consistently, and as it seemed to him now so mistakenly, pursued, ever since the Head of the school-house, had entertained his poor father in just the way he had. Hythe didn't need anyone to tell him that he had been acting weakly, and letting his private feelings sway his judgment, and even his sense of justice. He didn't need anyone to tell him, either, that the time had come to have it out with Giffard. But to have to accuse a fellow for whom, for reasons of one's own, one entertains feelings of gratitude and affection, of things which make one hot even to think of, isn't the sort of thing calculated to raise anyone's spirits.

Someone knocked at his door. It wasn't a buoyant knock. And when Ogle came in, he looked as dejected as he could well be.

"What do you want?" asked Hythe coldly.

"I'm so sick about it all, Hythe," answered Ogle, not rendered any better by his reception.

"Well, so you ought to be," retorted Hythe unsympathetically. "The rummy thing would be if you were anything else. I'd rather you'd have stopped away, though. I've just had the rest of your dirty lot in, and the place feels like a shambles. I'm trying to get some air!"

"Will it make any difference to my being in the Eleven, Hythe?" stammered Ogle.

"I suppose not," answered Hythe, grudgingly. "But it'll make a lot of difference to me, having to play with scum like you." Still lying on the window seat with his hands behind his head he studied Ogle critically, and the result of his observations was apparent in the following candid remarks.

"If ever there was a rotten, feeble, flabby thing in this world, Ogle, that's you! Look how you've always crawled after the Classics, and shunted your own friends off. And when they took you up again, just because you seemed so beastly lonely and down in the mouth, you've been going behind their backs like this all the time. If the Admirable's too crooked to play in the Match, hanging will be too good for you. There is a bit of an excuse

for Ge-ge because he's a foreigner, and half-baked. But a senior like you!"

He must have expected all this sweetness and light to have some effect on Ogle, of course. But the latter's shrinking figure and abject face and drooping mouth appalled him.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Ogle, don't be such a *worm*!" he cried, impatiently. "I've got to jaw you like this, but why do you stick it? Why don't you punch my head or something?"

"Because I don't feel like it," said Ogle. He hesitated a minute and then said, almost imploringly, "I wish you wouldn't go on like that, Hythe. Because the fact is, I've come to make a clean breast of it."

"Great Scot! You don't mean to say there's anything worse than what I know about?" the Captain exclaimed.

"Well, it was me who took your exam. books!" said Ogle, getting it out with a gulp.

Hythe whistled softly to himself. "Why?" he said, laconically.

"Oh, to spite you for collaring my place here," answered Ogle, not looking at him. "I planked the 'Beware' card down to bluff you into thinking it was the Brotherhood. Ge-ge was so mad with you for slanging him for what he hadn't done——"

"It *must* have been a new experience!" put in the Captain dryly.

"That he used them himself, afterwards, thinking he was making game of you."

"Silly ass!" said Hythe. "But there, I needn't talk! Anything else?"

"Well, I sneaked your stamp-album out of your study one night for Ge-ge, and put it back again the next day. I never could find out what he wanted with it, though."

Again the Captain whistled softly to himself. But he looked so different from the possessed-with-care, unapproachable individual Ogle had found on his entrance, that the latter wondered at him.

"It makes it a bit better, your having owned up like this, Ogle," he said, after a minute. "And it's taken a weight off my chest, I know that. Why, all the time I've been putting it down to a chap I like!"

The cruelty of the speech was quite unintentional. But Ogle winced as though a whip lash had struck him.

Hythe looked at him curiously. "Here, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, you Juggins!" he said, gruffly, after a minute, "and—and—oh, hang it, Ogle! why haven't you the sense to clear out while I'm in the mood to let you off altogether, and before that humble-pie mug of yours makes me change my mind!"

But though Ogle was getting off cheaply, Hythe had no intention of accommodating Gegechkory to the same extent, and as he set off to that gentleman's study, now, it would have been quite possible to imagine a more comfortable guest.

On the way there, he almost ran into an individual whose face he seemed to remember. The next minute he had recognised Mr. Paley, the stamp dealer.

"I was coming to see you, sir," said Mr. Paley, "in regard to that matter of the Mauritius stamp. Since writing to you, our firm has, by a great piece of good fortune, managed to secure another specimen, like the one you were interested in, and we have decided to give you the first refusal."

Had there ever been a time when Hythe had found anything to interest him in an early Mauritius, or any other stamp? But since Mr. Paley's evidence might be useful to corner Gegechkory with, he said:

"Would you mind waiting in my study, Mr. Paley? I'll be with you in a few minutes, and we'll talk it over."

For the probable customer of an early Mauritius Mr. Paley would have waited an eternity. Having signified as much and Hythe having pointed out his own particular abode, the latter made his way straight to Gegechkory's study.

Gegechkory looked done. Hythe had meant to deal out stern justice, but it would have been like hitting someone who was down, to have attempted very much of that kind of thing to a fellow with such an old, tired face on him as Gegechkory lifted up now.

"I've just seen Ogle," said Hythe, without any greeting.

"Yes?" answered Gegechkory, almost listlessly.

"He says you got him to sneak my stamp album. I suppose that means it was you who stole the Mauritius and the rest of 'em, and sold it to Paley?"

"So you have been on the spot of that, too. You do have all the luck!" said Gegechkory, as though the thought made his head ache.

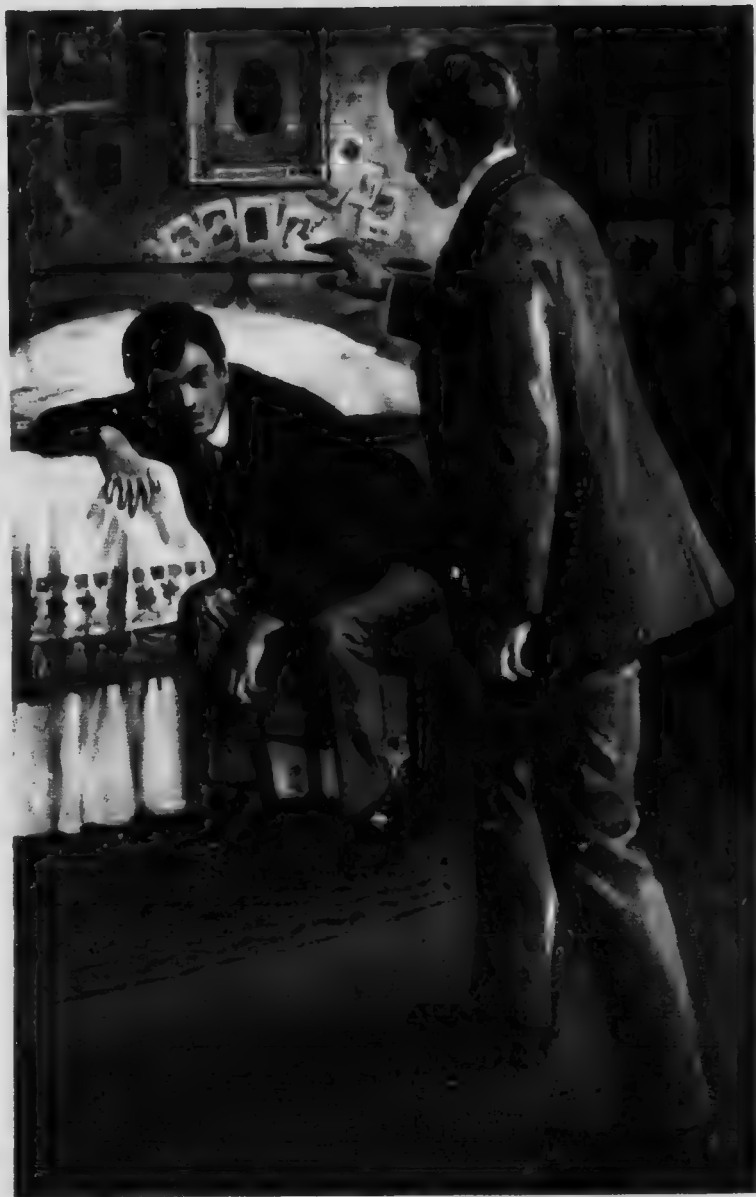
"I suppose you wouldn't call yourself a common thief?" asked Hythe.

"I might. It does not matter," answered Gegechkory.

Hythe looked at him sharply. "Why did you do it?" he said, and then quickly—horror-stricken—he exclaimed, "Oh, I say—don't—Pony! For goodness' sake, pull yourself together!"

It is a horrid sight to see a boy—and senior like Gegechkory, cry. Hythe didn't know where to look or what to do. "Bale up, Pony," he said after a minute. "Perhaps there's something I don't know."

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““Oh, I say, don't! For goodness' sake pull yourself together!””



It was as though a granite wall had changed into something human. It broke Gegechkory down utterly.

"It was for my father!" he said eagerly—pitifully—like a little child trying to make a grown-up person understand. "He is in the prison. He is in the cold and damp. He is feed on black bread. He is in the chains—my father! And there comes to me Alexis, the old servant of family. 'Here,' he said, 'is chance for your father. He is to be transferred to Siberia—and for gold—much gold—I have made interest with the gaoler that he let him escape—the rest is arrange.' He say this to me—to me—who of the gold have not a glimmering." Here Gegechkory threw up his hands, palms outwards, with a despairing gesture and his shabby coat sleeves, with the cuffs inches higher up the arms than they ought to have been, fixed Hythe's attention, and held it—"not a glimmering"—Gegechkory's voice was mounting.

"Whoa, old chap. Yes?" said Hythe.

"I know there is much purse in your album. I know the valuation of stamps. I get the album. I take out the most purse-ful ones. I sell them. I think nothing of the rights or the wrongs."

"Why did you take Giffard's name, though?" asked Hythe.

"Not him to harm, I do most assure you,"

said Gegechkory, almost wringing his hands in his effort to make himself believed. "It is to make the delay in case it is all discovered before Alexis has time to make the tracks of the gold. Then when he have took it, and the tyr-r-ant"—remembering to whom he was talking, a puzzled look that again reminded one of a child came into his eyes—"say, 'It is Giffard who have took my stamps,' I laugh in his face, and say 'It is I, Gegechkory!' But you have never accusated until to-day Why?"

"Never you mind. Go ahead," said Hythe.

"I give the money to Alexis. He fly. wait—ah, how I wait! He return this morning—now; he say the gold is not enough the gaoler demand more. It is finish, I can no more. You have lock up your album!"

"Well, of all——" Hythe was beginning reference to the last sentence. But he changed his mind and said instead—"Sure he's not rooking you?"

"Rooking? You would say cheating? Gegechkory drew himself up quivering with fire and pride. "He is an old servant family—of us the Gegechkory. He would do for us if we so desire it—it would be his duty."

"When you've come off the stilts, Pony, can get on!" said Hythe. "How much money does the Johnny want?"

"Fifty pounds!" said Gegechkory, his voice breaking.

"Bale up, Ge-ge, I tell you!" said Hythe sharply. "Is there still time?"

"There is the time—Alexis have not yet leaved—but there is not the pounds," said Gegechkory.

Hythe did some rapid thinking. "Look here, old fellow," he said then, eagerly, humbly almost, as though he was asking a favour. "You must let me help you. Do, there's a good chap! It's an awfully sporting thing to be mixed up in, and I wouldn't be out of it for a lot. But how to get the cash at a minute's notice like this. Except—here, I'll be back in a jiff!"

He did the journey back to his own study in record time, and Mr. Paley, who had always thought him rather a sedate young gentleman, was surprised at the way he burst open the door.

"Look here, Mr. Paley!" he said. "I can't talk about the Mauritius now. I'm too pressed. But I'll come to you in the holiday and do a deal with you for it if it is not sold—and get you to fill up some blanks in my album, which you ought to be able to, if anybody could! But what I want at present—now—to-day—is fifty pounds. Can you let me have it?"

"Well, really, sir," said Mr. Paley. "Aren't you rather young?"

"Yes, I am, Mr. Paley," said Hythe. "But there won't be any difficulty in my getting it, though there may be some delay. I could have had it for the asking—before. As my father has arranged things it is—fairly easy—now." The evenness of Hythe's voice had to be so carefully manufactured when he had to talk about this sort of things. "Besides," he added in a lighter tone, "if you've any doubt about it, take my stationer's album as security—if it isn't worth a joss, I'll give you sight more than that I shall know what to do. I don't think about your prices!"

"Oh, I shouldn't care to do that, sir, with an old customer like yourself," said Mr. Paley. He knew what Mr. Hythe had been possessed of and how the money had been left. "If you have the money in notes or gold, I'll take a cheque?"

"In gold, please, Mr. Paley," said Hythe.

"Then our Mr. James," said Mr. Paley, looking at his watch, "shall bring it you by the last train to-night, and I needn't say if you are pleased we shall be to see you, sir, in the holidays."

When Hythe got back to Gegechkory's study—but what they said to each other was between themselves. There are many confidences in which a third person has no right to meddle. But when it was necessary, Gegechkory seized his hand in his embrace.

way. "Now, I have indeed a brother," he said, and then flushed painfully at the grin which accompanied the Captain's dry rejoinder:

"Well, then, I hope you're satisfied at last, Pony."

And as if Hythe's day hadn't been full enough, who should he find waiting for him in his study when he got back but Giffard.

"I'm beastly sorry about it all, Hythe," he said with evident sincerity. "I don't know why we went on with the idiotic business! Nobody except Ge-ge, got any fun out of it as far as I could see. I've been an awful ass!"

"Not more than me," said Hythe, to Giffard's amazement. "I could kick myself when I remember all the wretched things I've been suspecting you of. But why, you everlasting chump, did you want to go and shy a table-cloth over something on your desk, on the very day my books were cribbed?"

"So you've potted that too?" said Giffard, though without in the least understanding what Hythe was driving at. "Well, you see, Bunge and I'd been going in for a competition, to try and place fifty Johnnies out of books, correctly. The papers with the names of the winners was on my desk. I'd got the second prize. It was ten pounds. But I

wasn't too keen on your seeing it. That's why I worked the table-cloth dodge."

"But wasn't the competition all right then?" asked Hythe in bewilderment.

"Oh, the *competition* was right enough," answered Giffard in some natural embarrassment. "But you see Bunge was rather careless of it. In fact he didn't know it was a competition at all. He thought I was getting up all that rot to improve my mind! I'm not you're such a quixotic beggar, you might have said that I ought to have gone sha-
with him."

"I might!" said Hythe.

"There! I knew it!" said Giffard, laughing, half uneasy. "And perhaps I would have done, too, if that bicycle I was so hot on getting hadn't come to that, and a little bit over! And anyway, old Bunge would never have come across the competition on his own, and it didn't hurt me to——"

"Oh, stop it, Ginger!" said Hythe. "You don't need me to tell you it's a little shabby. But I'm too dead sick of slapping chaps to-day to do anything of the kind. It will be your turn to go for me when I've slapped you!"

But after Hythe had told the story of his suspicions, going for him seemed to be the last idea in Giffard's mind.

"Well, I must say, Scissors, old chap, you seem to have been doing dry-nurse to me, lately," he said staring. "I wonder why?"

"Never you mind!" answered Hythe in the same word, he had used to Gegechkory, in that very connection.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MATCH

Lest you should think that in skipping the intervening weeks, and coming straight to the match, I am neglecting my duty as a chronicler, I hasten to state that during the interval St. Osyth's had had no history to speak of. It had lived, and breathed, and thought, and talked cricket, and snatched its meals, and done its lessons in intervals of the same. Nobody, except the juniors led by Ayscough, believed for a minute that St. Osyth's had any chance of winning the cup. But from the way Hythe had licked his team into shape, it really did seem as though Arundel might have to fight for it. And the Doctor, looking on with those kind, wise, young eyes of his, did not check their enthusiasm. There was plenty of time to supply St. Osyth's with some rudimentary sense of proportion in the days to come, just as there would be time to take Yaeger's and the Hittites down a peg or two, in case their new-born belief in themselves got too overtopping.

One incident, though, there was, which I must chronicle before I forget it. On second

thoughts this seems rather a casual way in which to refer to the momentous decision which was come to by Samborne and Giffard and Spratt and the rest of the original Eleven. For after talking it over together, and finding that after all Scissors really did seem to have some notion of cricket in him, and that also the thought of being out of it altogether was not to be borne, they graciously decided to reverse their original decision, and consent to play in the match after all.

Hythe received them very nicely, when they came to convey this cheering news to him on the eve of the match. He made the climbing down as easy for them as he could. Nor did he seem to resent all the trouble their previous attitude had put him to. But the static gratitude with which they expected the offer to be received was singularly absent.

"Awfully sorry, you chaps," he said, "but I daren't take any risks. I know the play of my lot and I don't know yours. Besides, it's too late to go unsettling them now."

If his hearers felt as crestfallen as they looked, the experience must have been salutary to them.

"It's been pouring in the night, Hythe!" was Ayscough's greeting to his lord, as he woke him up on the eventful morning of the match.

Hythe didn't tear his hair, or take it out of Ayscough, or anything violent. But he didn't pretend it wasn't a tragedy either.

"Still it's worse for them than us!" declared Ayscough.

"Why?" asked Hythe staggered. Ayscough's logic seemed too good to be true somehow.

"Because we're going to win, and they're not, of course!" answered Ayscough confidently.

Hythe laughed and jumped up, cheered in spite of himself. After all, Coughdrop was rather a jolly little animal to have about!

Never in the history of St. Osyth's had there been such a gathering. The Doctor seemed to know half the world. It seemed almost a pity that the match was to be played at St. Osyth's instead of at Arundel this year, as in that case there would have been fewer of St. Osyth's friends to see their fall.

There were Giffard's father and mother and his pretty sisters, whose hair, whether up or down, seemed to be the colour of cowslips, and who were pitying him so openly for not having been "chosen" to play in the Eleven, that he was writhing under it. There were the Admirable's sisters, at whose brown gipsy faces everybody looked twice, who were evidently actuated by very different

sentiments about *their* brother. There was Ayscough's father, an overworked country parson, to whom the railway fare meant something, but who had yet managed to come up. Apparently he hadn't yet got over the shock of hearing his small son apologising for not being able to put in more time with him, as he had to "see after" the Captain. The distinguished-looking foreigner whose side Gegechkory didn't seem able to leave, was the Count Gegechkory whose romantic escape from his guards, on the way to Siberia, had been the talk of the world last week. "It" was trotting beside a big sunburnt gentleman, who turned out to be the redoubtable Cousin Dick, whom the Doctor had invited over as his guest for the night, an act which "It" rightly took to mean that the little difference which had occurred at the end of the last term between the Doctor and himself was now made up. Another of the Doctor's guests, too, who had come down to give away the cup, was no less a personage than General Nugent. But in answer to his nephew's expressions of polite astonishment, he was at some pains to make plain that his visit was exclusively paid to the Doctor. The general always had such a pleasant little way with him !

I think the principal impression Arundel carried away of the Captain of St. Osyth's

was his extreme coolness. They might have marvelled at it more had they known what a cart-load of responsibility he had to carry on his shoulders. The Arundel Captain said he didn't recognise many of the team this year. And Hythe said no, he wouldn't, and in his pleasant, easy way changed the subject. The Captain of St. Osyth's had no intention of washing her dirty linen in public.

How terribly fit Arundel in their red and blue blazers did look, to be sure! But I don't know that the spectators could have found much to take exception to in our own green and whites either!

Hythe won the toss. Well, that was something, at any rate, and St. Osyth's, who were in the bluest of funks already, did manage to get up a cheer. Having won it, he stepped across the field to look at the pitch. Nobody thought much of the action at the time. But as a matter of fact worlds depended on it. The sun had not been out long enough to dry more than the surface of the sodden turf, and the thin crust meant danger if Buchanan, the Arundel left-hander, was in form. Now, Hythe realised that if St. Osyth's were to win, it would be by its bowling. Could he take the risk of putting the other side in on a fast-drying pitch? But his judgment telling him that to give the opponents first knock was the soundest policy, he did not hesitate.

"I am going to put them in," he said laconically, when he returned to the pavilion.

The anxious faces his own men turned to him! And the groan of derision that came from the spectators! But Hythe cut short all criticism by ordering his men to get ready.

"Oh, why did we back out?" almost moaned the original First Eleven. "We'd have made the beggar change his mind!"

"The idiots he's got now let him do anything he likes with them!" said Samborne, so beside himself that he forgot to lower his voice.

"'Cause why? 'Cause they know when they're well off!" piped up Ayscough, the loyal.

Hythe led the Eleven into the field in dead silence. St. Osyth's resented his unorthodox method too much to give him the usual applause. On the other hand, to point the difference, when the two Arundel boys came out, there was a hearty round of clapping.

Unfortunately, too, the beginning did not promise to support Hythe's policy. The wicket seemed to play quite easily, and if runs did not come fast, the batsmen never seemed in difficulties. They treated Malet's slows with respect, but Ogle they scored off freely. Thirty went up without a separation being effected, and then Hythe made a

change which brought him into still further disfavour. In the ordinary course Edwards would have been the first change, but instead Nugent was seen to be peeling.

"Well, of all the fools! To put a chancy bowler like Nugent on now!" exclaimed Spratt.

The general, who overheard the remark, and who, strange to say, was observing Nugent's preparations with something not unlike eagerness, looked glum.

It is safe to say that no one was prepared for the sensation of the coming over. The first ball, Lucraft, the tall Arundel crack, stepped back to hook to leg. The ball broke right across his bat and hit the off stump.

"Well bowled!" went up the cry. Was it possible that the general was adding his voice to the rest?

But more was to come. The fourth ball of the over was a straight one, and the new-comer got his leg in front of it. The appeal went against him. And then the succeeding ball which his successor should have left alone was snicked gently into the hands of Edwards at slip. Three of the best bats for thirty was not formidable. Hythe made a further change at this stage, taking off Malet in favour of Edwards. In this again fortune was on his side. Edwards went on with the confidence born of emulation. Eight more

runs were scored by tedious caution before he secured his first wicket, and then with a superb yorker he clean bowled Addison, who had opened the innings.

The excitement was growing. Arundel was known to have a decided "tail." The first five bats could mostly be depended upon to put up a big score, but with four of them out so cheaply the prospects were not encouraging.

By painfully slow play the score was taken to fifty-nine. Hythe, knowing Nugent's temperament, had wisely given him a rest. He now felt that he could put him on again with safety. But a short run accounted for the fifth wicket. Crichton made a wonderful return to the Captain, who whipped off the bails whilst the batsman was still a yard short of the crease. Bradley, the next man in, did not survive the over. He hit one of Nugent's "googlies" out of the ground, and in stepping out to treat the next in the same way, was smartly stumped by Hythe. The tail did better than was expected. There was quite a good last wicket stand, and ninety-six was registered before the innings was over.

Still, it was a moderate total, and with the pitch considerably improved, it was felt that the St. Osyth's should be able to pass it. There *was* a change of tone now towards Hythe, I can tell you!

But he had no surprises for the spectators in the order of going in. Crichton and Curwen were the first pair, and seventeen were put up before the former lifted a ball into the long field and it was held. Malet followed, and the pace slowed down with his advent. Neither was of the sort to take any risks, and the score mounted by singles, until Curwen opened his shoulders to a half volley, and sent it to the boundary. Thus encouraged, he scored two more boundaries in quick succession, before he had the misfortune to touch a rising ball into point's hands. It was two for thirty-seven when Hythe put himself in third.

"Hurrah! Bravo, Hythe! Good old Scissors!" Those were the sort of shouts that greeted him now.

Hythe played out the over without attempting to score and then lost Malet, who was snapped at the wicket. Things were not quite so bright with the two safest bats dismissed. Ogle came next in the order and stayed with the Captain until fifteen had been added. Then he was bowled by a ball that swerved in from the off. Fifty-three for four was a little better.

Hythe had now got into double figures and was playing with steady confidence. Peppery old Phillpott was his next partner, and proved to be in a smiting mood. He

signalised his appearance by a beautiful leg boundary, and the reception he received proved too much for him. He made a terrific slash at the following ball, mistimed it, and was caught at the wicket.

"Shall we do it? Shall we do it? Shall we do it?" That was what Ayscough was saying over and over again to himself, dancing about on his little pins, unable to keep still.

"We've got a tail as well as them—worse luck!" said Giffard uneasily.

"Of course he'll put Edwards in—he's the only one they can depend on now," said Samborne.

It was at this point that Nugent was seen strolling from the pavilion.

"It was a risk enough before—but to put Nugent in now—*now*! Was there ever such an idiot before! He ought to have gone in eight or ninth," exclaimed Spratt.

The general had not changed his position. Again he overheard the remark. Only this time he looked at the gentleman with two t's to his name resentfully. Then he bent his glance on his nephew with interest, hope—confidence—in it almost.

Nugent opened nervously, so much so that Hythe came across to him.

"Steady does it, old chap," he said.

Just that! and though Nugent muttered

under his breath, "Get along, you old cucumber!" his nervousness was gone.

All the bowling seemed to come alike to him after that. He scored all round the wicket, whilst his skipper was content to keep his end up. Ten succeeded ten, and cheer rose upon cheer as the Arundel total was approached and then passed. The lunch hour was reached with them still together and the score at 105, Nugent having 31 and Hythe 27 to his credit.

On resuming, the score continued to mount steadily, Nugent again scoring the more freely. He stayed till the total reached 143 and then had the misfortune to be bowled off his pad. His innings of fifty-six was the bright feature of the home batting.

"Hurrah! Played indeed, sir!" followed his return to the Pavilion. The general didn't join in now. It was for other people to praise the Nugents, now that this young nephew of his had proved himself one of the stock.

Edwards was got rid of cheaply, and a little was expected of the next three batsmen they did not upset anticipations. When Bunge came out the end was as good as reached.

But Bunge too had a little surprise in store for St. Osyth's. Acting on instructions from Hythe, he stolidly put his bat in front of the ball and had the good luck to keep the latter

from rising. The spectators yelled with appreciation of the situation, when the crowd closed round him like greedy cats waiting to swoop, and each time he eluded their vigilance. Meanwhile Hythe had abandoned his careful defence, and was making the most of this last opportunity. He hit out at everything, and so thoroughly had he played himself in, that he added thirty runs in as many minutes before the valiant Bunge put up a lob to point. He took out his bat for a sterling 63 and gave his side the useful lead of 91.

"What did I tell you?" shrieked Ayscough, to all and every. But nobody listened. They were too occupied in expressing their own sentiments. And to ears not too well accustomed to it, their adulation must have had a pleasant sound.

In their second attempt Arundel fared better. The ground had quite recovered from the rain, and gave the attack no assistance. Lucraft and Addison started off at a great pace and soon knocked Nugent off his length. Ogle, too, proved expensive. The runs slowed down when Edwards was associated with Malet, but neither batsman looked like getting out. Fifty went up within the first half hour and the century was hoisted with the two still together.

Gloom began to fall upon the home

supporters. The advantage of the first innings was already wiped out and the prospects pointed to St. Osyth's being set a formidable score to win. There was still two and a half hours' play. Addison was the first to go, being finely caught by Curwen, right on the boundary. He had made 45 out of 110.

The bowlers had become a little demoralised by this severe punishment and none of them were up to form. But if Hythe felt a sinking of the heart when he saw Bradley, the Arundel Jessop, come in first wicket down, there was nothing in his manner to show it. He didn't encourage Nugent by words this time. But he gave him a little nod which did just as well, as he placed his field for the big hitting he anticipated.

And sure enough it came. Lucraft scored almost as fast as Bradley, and boundaries came in quick succession. 160 was registered and the want of a really fast bowler was becoming glaringly patent. And then when the two smiters seemed set for the afternoon the sharp "How's that?" of the skipper behind the stumps was answered by the umpire in the affirmative. Lucraft had touched a hard full pitch from Edwards in Hythe's safe keeping.

"Well caught!" How tremulous with anxiety the voices were beginning to sound now touched with chill despair.

Still, the separation put a little more life into the attack, and a few minutes later two more wickets fell. Nugent bowled Bradley all round his legs and caught and bowled fourth man. Arundel, however, were now 74 runs in with six wickets in hand.

Play ruled slow after this, and it took forty-five minutes, and cost three more wickets to complete the second century, at which stage the Arundel Captain declared. St. Osyth's were thus left with 107 to make in an hour and a quarter. Hythe was faced with a delicate problem to solve. The safer policy was to play out time and claim victory on the first innings. But his inclinations were all in favour of a win outright. Could the runs be made in the time without risking too much? He consulted with Nugent, confiding his own sentiments, and Nugent laughed back a "With you, noble captain!" in a voice which sounded as though it had never drawled in its life. They might at least, they decided, sacrifice two or three wickets, and then if the fates were against them, put in Curwen, to cheat the clock.

With this decision Hythe took Crichton to the wicket, as he felt he was better able to adapt himself to the emergency than his more brilliant partner of the preceding innings. The opening was promising. The Admirable

was in his happiest mood, driving with great power, and bringing off one or two of his favourite leg-glances. Hythe too, played more freely as the occasion demanded, and made 23 out of 57 before his partner foolishly ran himself out. But victory was now well in sight. There was time enough to make the remaining fifty runs, so the Captain decided to keep Nugent in reserve in case of accidents.

"I should have put Nugent in," said Spratt, whose opinions, it will be noticed, had undergone a surprising change within the last few hours.

"Well, perhaps Hythe knows what he's about better than you do," retorted Samborne. It was a great concession.

And as it proved Hythe's judgment was again sound. Neither Malet nor Curwen, good bats as they were, were suited to hustling tactics, and in their anxiety to make runs, they both fell to the wiles of Addison with still 39 runs wanting. Failing Nugent, St. Osyth's chances were again very doubtful.

But Nugent wasn't going to fail them. With one hard, steady glance at him, the Captain told him that he'd just not *got* to.

A profound hush settled down as Nugent came—not strolled—to the rescue. Through it you might almost have heard Ayscough

saying to himself in little short breaths—
“Just 39—only thirty-nine!”

A mingled shout of fear and relief rose as Addison dropped a hard return from the first ball. The escape however seemed to unsettle the batsman and a few anxious moments of suspense followed a series of flukey strokes.

“Steady!” Hythe couldn’t have said it, of course. Nugent couldn’t even have sworn that he looked it. But however he managed to convey the mandate the result was the same, and a well-timed cut through the slip was his instant response.

This stroke renewed his confidence and he made no further mistakes. It now seemed only a question whether the two could make the runs in time. They had both abandoned the policy of win or lose, and were playing steadily, for victory if they could, but at any rate to run no further risk of defeat. With still nine runs wanting there was only five minutes to close of play. Addison was bowling like a book and the fielding was very close.

Nobody said anything. The general might have been carved in stone. Ayscough was as mute as a mouse.

Hythe had to take the last over. He played the first ball: the next he stepped out to, and lifted it high above the bowler’s head. Five more to be made in four balls!

The general's knuckles showed white through the skin. Hythe and Nugent might have been playing to a silent world.

The fourth ball—a straight one—Hythe hooked for a couple, and then with the last of the over, a ringing yell went up as they saw it bounce off the outstretched hand of cover-point and race to the boundary. St. Osyth's had won on the stroke of time!

I needn't tell you how the school shouted itself hoarse with cheers until Hythe made them transfer some of their attentions in that way to Arundel. And if hearing so many nice things from the St. Osyth's Captain about his play, and what a ripping match it had been, altogether, and how close a shave at the finish, could atone to the Arundel Captain for defeat, then he ought to have been satisfied.

But it was Hythe's turn to have the nice things said to him, when the general presented him with the cup. And among other memorable utterances he said the Captain ought to make a great tactician in the future, and that when his nephew *entered the Army* he hoped Hythe would do the same.

So it was not to be the office stool! And if the Doctor had been Nugent's elder brother he couldn't have given him a gladder look.

But the general couldn't keep at that seraphic pitch all the time, and in the minute

or two's private conversation he had with his young nephew, after his public duties were at an end, he seemed tempted to drop into his old manner.

What he had done to-day was quite creditable, he was good enough to say. But there were other things that had come to his ears, about painting a certain mare red—oh, it wasn't the Doctor who had told him, Nugent needn't think that!

"I don't, sir!" put in Nugent. And the look he threw at the Doctor was quite a good return for the one the latter had given him.

But to paint a mare red! the general went on. Who had ever thought of doing such a thing before! Had Nugent himself ever heard of anything worse?

But Nugent seemed to understand him better to-day. And the general certainly couldn't complain of any want of spirit in his reply.

"Well, sir," he said, slowly, looking the general straight in his face, "I did once hear of a chap who used to get his tailor to slip a couple of sovereigns into his trousers pockets, when he ordered a new suit of clothes, and charge it up to his grandfather, in the bill!"

"You young dog!" said the general, when he could speak. But the call in Nugent's laughing eyes was to his own far-away youth,

and drew out more response than you could have believed. Its more tangible result was the present of a five pound note, to help towards the big supper which always followed the match.

Arundel, the parting guest, had to be sped off, of course—and St. Osyth's couldn't help being rather glad that it had to catch an early train, because its presence naturally acted as a check on one's more exuberant expressions of satisfaction. So that Hythe had his hands full. But all the same he managed to get in quite a long conversation with Ayscough's father, which that youth observed from afar off, with a fearful joy.

He discovered what it was about, though, when, Arundel finally sped, the Captain had retired to his study, to do a change and Nugent had come after him, to ask him to help him to expend the general's munificent offering to the best advantage.

"Now off it, Coughdrop!" said the Captain to that all-important person. "I'm able to change my shirt without your seeing me through with it, though you mightn't think it! Besides, I shall get enough of you, in all conscience, in the holidays."

"How's that?" said Nugent, while it being the first Ayscough had heard of it, he not unnaturally pricked up his ears.

"Oh, he's going on a jaunt with me

abroad," answered Hythe. "His governor doesn't seem to mind having him taken off his hands for a bit!"

Ayscough's feelings on receiving the intelligence impelled him to stand on his head. And though he was assisted to his feet with a vigour which conveyed to him that the Captain's study was not the sort of place in which to indulge in antics of that kind, Hythe's hand rested on his little fag's shoulder an instant longer than it need have done.

"Where are we going to, Hythe?" he breathed.

"Oh, lots of places!" the Captain answered. "I'm coming to stay a night at your place, and we'll make out a topping route together!"

Ayscough's departure had to be expedited with the flat of a bat after that, a method of upbringing which he was used to, and which was calculated to instil healthier sentiments into his mind than if he had gathered that, in that lonely home life in front of him, the Captain of St. Osyth's was really grateful for his affection.

But nothing happens quite as we think, and there were indications the minute the two friends came out into the open together, that Hythe was to have not one, but several homes, open to him in the future. He didn't

feel like going back to that London home of his just yet—but as he had lent it for the time to Count Gegechkory and his son, until the former could make some use of some powerful interests he had to try and secure a pardon from the Czar—it was pleasant to feel that it was always ready for him when he cared to go.

But General Nugent, almost as soon as he saw him, asked him to come and spend the holidays at the hall. And Hythe, quite flushed with the honour of it, because 'Nick' Nugent was such a great hero of his, still, said he couldn't all the time, because of that promise to Ayscough, and because he shouldn't like to disappoint the kid. But if the general would let Nugent come with them, first——

Well, the general would. There seemed no limits to his amiability, to-day. But they must promise not to get into mischief, and he must bring Ayscough along with him afterwards, and would Nugent like to invite anybody else?

"Care to come, Admirable?" asked Nugent.

Wouldn't the Admirable? You never heard an invitation accepted with more flattering alacrity than that. And because Giffard was so ostentatiously looking another way, in case they should think he was cadging

for an invitation, the general asked him too. And his acceptance was almost as prompt as Crichton's had been.

"But we must see something of them too," said Sir William, coming up with his wife, and the army of sisters Giffard seemed to possess.

Lady Giffard was as cordial as she could be. She would love to see her son's friends, of course. But there was to be a big house party at Framlingham. Still, if the dear boys didn't mind being put up in dressing-rooms, or the old school-room—

"Or the bath-room!" put in the youngest of the cowslip-haired damsels, pertly.

Well, Giffard thought that was a pretty silly remark, too. But he was surprised to find the Captain laughing at it as though it was the finest joke in the world. It surprised him as much as it did the Admirable, when because they were plaguing him to, he introduced the hero of the day to *his* sisters, and found Hythe treating the gypsy-faced ones with a shyness and humility which it had never seemed to occur to him to introduce into his dealings with himself!

If I were to tell you all the glories of that match supper, it would take me from now till to-morrow night. And the Doctor's guests, as they sat and smoked with the study windows opened, listened to the hilarious

cheers and songs and toasts, which had all been a part of their own yesterday.

One thing they couldn't hear, though. But since the Doctor hadn't once designed to deny it himself all this time, I don't know that it mattered so much. It was a little conversation which took place between Noad and Giffard.

"I say, Giffard," said the former, edging up with a very important face, while the supper was in progress. "I found out from some of my people who were up to-day, that Mr. FitzHerbert said he'd rather not, when the trustees first offered him the post here. Hadn't I better tell the others?"

"What's the use?" asked Giffard indifferently. "They know by now he's not the sort to do anything shoddy. But shut up, man! Hythe's starting the Floreat."

"There's the old song!" said the General, enthusiastically, as the strains of the "Floreat Osythia," rolled out to them.

Then there came that other one beginning—

"St Osyth's is a school of pride.
Of learning and renown, sir!"

And he recognised that too.

"But listen, this is a new one, surely!" said someone.

It was a new one of a topical nature, which Spratt had composed half an hour before, and which began:

"Hail thou, Captain! One and only,
Our St. Osyth's truest man!"

"Why, that's the Bismarck anthem!
There's impudence for you, if you like!" said
Cousin Dick!

"Ah, well!" said the Doctor tolerantly.
"It's well to be young, and to know that one
belongs to the finest school in the world, and
has the finest captain——"

"The young rascals seem tolerably well
satisfied with another of their possessions,
too!" said the general dryly.

And, really, they did, if the vigour in
which the toast "Three cheers for the
Doctor!" was being responded to, provided
any guide to their feelings!

THE END